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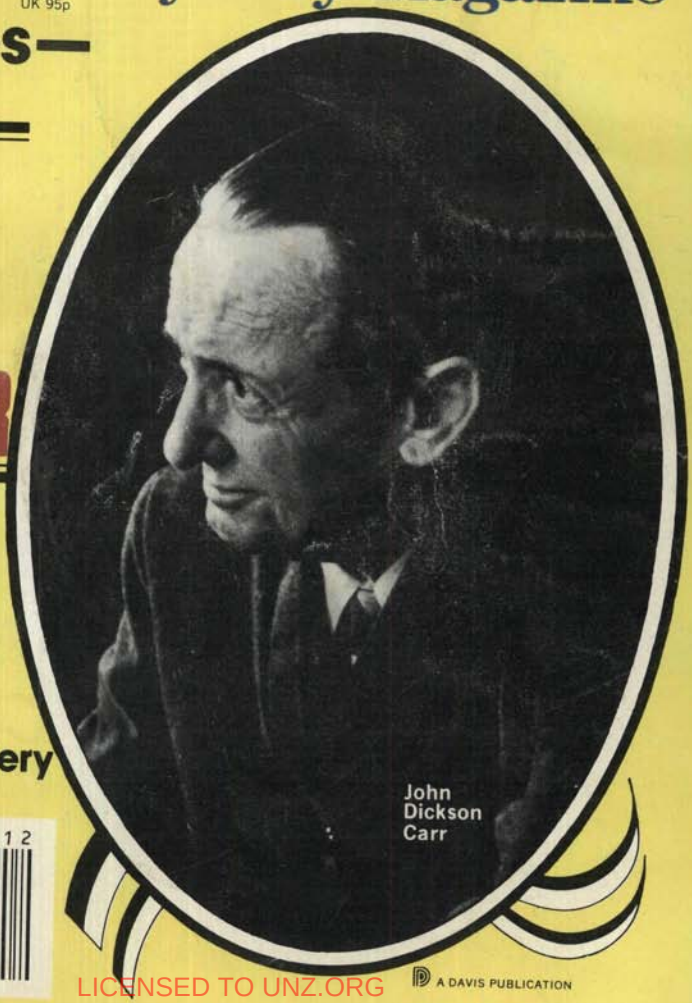

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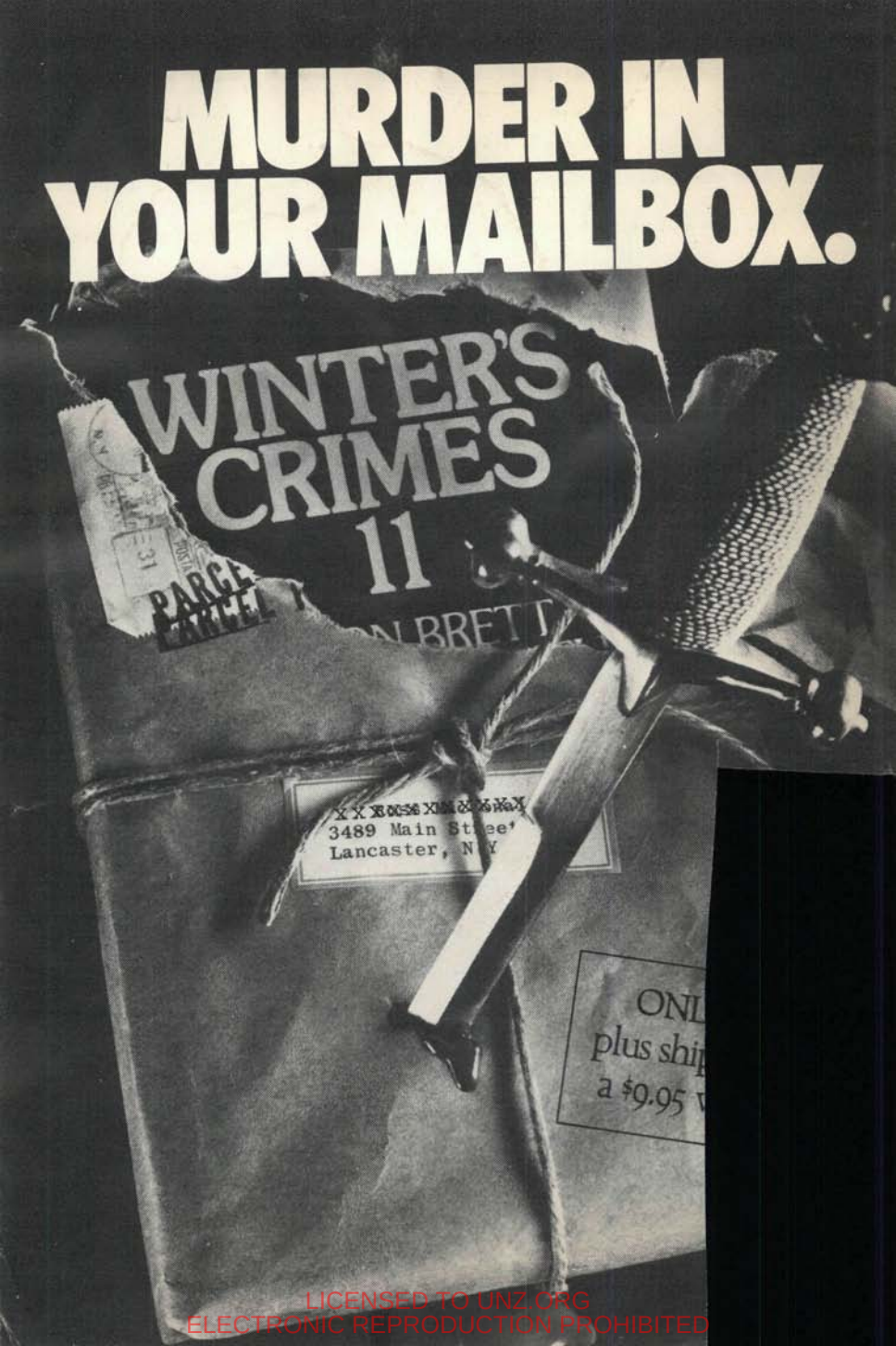

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a *NEW* crime story by

CLARK HOWARD

"Hanley, younger but still not young, had flat, dangerous eyes and no conscience. Dwyer, older, seasoned by years behind prison walls, had the look of a fox in its own forest." Dwyer was the top con in the precisely structured social strata of the prison—the man to go to for such indispensables as a forged pass . . .

TOP CON

by CLARK HOWARD

Max Hanley made his way slowly across the big prison yard, walking around groups of blue-clad men who were congregating to play dominoes or lift weights or dope out next Sunday's football parlays or just rap about their latest never-ending gripes. He moved gradually over to the bleachers, lighting a cigarette as he went. The man he wanted to see was sitting alone on a low bleacher bench and reading a newspaper. He was an older con, in his late fifties, a lifer; he wore bifocals under a gray receding hairline.

"Frank Dwyer?" Hanley said, sitting down beside him.

"That's me," the old con replied, glancing at his visitor, then resuming his reading.

"I'm—"

"I know who you are," Dwyer said before Hanley could tell him. "You're Max Hanley. Former public enemy number one. Doing sixty-five years for bank robberies all over the midwest. You cell over in south block. Work in the dry-cleaning plant. What's on your mind?"

Hanley smiled. "You sure you don't already know that too?"

Dwyer looked at him, squinting. "I could probably guess. Been here about a year now, haven't you?"

"A year too long," Hanley said tightly.

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"So you're thinking of 'hanging 'em on a limb,' is that it?"

" 'Hanging 'em on a limb?' What's that mean?"

"Means hanging your shackles on the limb of a tree and running away," Dwyer explained. "Old chain-gang expression."

Hanley studied the older man. "You were on a chain gang?"

"For over a year. Until I hung 'em on a limb and escaped. I did time on the Rock, too. Alcatraz. You didn't think you were the only public enemy in here, did you?"

"I never thought about it one way or the other," Max Hanley said with an edge. "But you're right—I am looking to bust out of here. I asked around about some things I'll be needing. Everybody said to see Frank Dwyer. They said Frank Dwyer was a lifer who knew this joint better than anybody. They said Frank Dwyer was the top con in here when it came to getting anything done. Were they right?"

"I've got a connection here and there," Dwyer admitted. "But I don't work for nothing."

"Nobody asked you to. I've got friends *and* money on the outside. It just so happens that the things I need are on the *inside*." Hanley leaned forward, elbows on knees, and dropped his cigarette butt on the ground. Dwyer eyed him distastefully.

"You're not supposed to do that with your cigarette butt," he said. "You're supposed to tamp it out, peel the paper back, and roll it into a little ball, and spread the loose tobacco on the ground. Keeps the litter down. That's the rule."

Hanley grunted softly. "If I was interested in rules I wouldn't be in here, old man. And I wouldn't be sitting here planning a break."

"That's the trouble with you young people," Dwyer complained. "You got no respect for anything. This may be a prison, but it's where you *live*. That's good enough reason to keep it clean."

"Climb down off your soapbox," Hanley said flatly. "I didn't come over here for no lecture. Are you open to making some money or aren't you?"

"I'm open," Dwyer said with a sigh. "A man's got to get along somehow." He folded his newspaper, carefully and neatly, and put it in the pocket of his denim jacket, which was also carefully and neatly folded on the bench next to him. "What's your plan?" he asked.

Hanley shook his head. "You don't have to know the plan. All you have to know is what I need from you. Then we'll talk price."

Dwyer shrugged. "Suit yourself. Shoot."

"I want three yard passes from the dispensary to the kitchen. I

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want them signed by a doctor, so they won't be questioned. Can you handle that?"

"Sure."

"Okay. Next I want three white bake-shop uniforms. Just the pants and shirts—I don't need the hats. One size medium and two larges."

"Three bake-shop uniforms, okay," Dwyer said, nodding.

"Last, I want a package moved from the shoe shop over to the waste bins behind the sheet-metal shop. It'll have to be moved on the exact day I say, no earlier and no later."

"How big a package?"

"Shoe-box size."

Dwyer nodded again. "No problem. Okay. That it?"

Hanley studied the old con for a long moment. Then he said, "I'm going to have a pretty involved plan going here. I'd like to have some idea who your contacts are, how you're going to arrange all this—"

Dwyer was already shaking his head. "Sorry. That's my business. I'll give you a guarantee that everything you want will be done. But that's all. No details. My guarantee will have to be enough."

"Personal guarantee?" Max Hanley asked.

"Personal guarantee. Absolutely."

That satisfied Hanley. He and Dwyer both understood that Dwyer had just put his life on the line to guarantee his performance.

"Let's get to the price now," the old convict said. "We're talking some pretty heavy money here."

Hanley feigned a surprised look. "For what? For stealing a few passes and some bake-shop uniforms?"

Dwyer shook his head and smiled. He knew when someone was trying to handle him. "No," he said easily, "for moving that package from the shoe shop to the sheet-metal waste bins. I mean, I have to assume that package ain't somebody's lunch. You want to tell me what's in it?"

Hanley shook his head. "No."

"Then I'll tell you. Guns."

A moment of silence fell between them. They sat there side by side, both leaning forward with forearms on knees, looking at but not really seeing the mass of blue-clad men milling about in the yard. Hanley, younger but still not young, had flat, dangerous eyes and no conscience. Dwyer, older, seasoned by years behind prison walls, had the look of a fox in its own forest. In the silence that

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pervaded the moment, each decided that he did not like the other. But that didn't matter. It wasn't necessary for them to be friends in order for them to strike a deal.

"Look it," Dwyer finally said, "let's stop playing games with each other. Here's my position. Forget the signed passes and the bake-shop uniforms—those are nothing and we both know it. I just happen to be able to get them and you don't. If you were bringing a break down on the joint, I'd get them for you and we'd be talking favors instead of cash money. But you're not going to be around to pay back favors, so we've got to deal in terms of cash money.

"Now what you're really buying is moving guns around inside the walls. You know as well as I do that's about as heavy as it can get. We're not talking dope or stolen canteen supplies or such. We're talking guns. Get caught and it's a formal felony charge that'll bring another ten-year sentence—and it'll be *consecutive*, not concurrent, tagged onto the end of the present sentence. Plus which you know how it'll be served—in the hole. I've done hole time in D Block on Alcatraz, and in the SHU—the Security Housing Unit—at Folsom. Neither one was no picnic, and I was a lot younger then too. So you're gonna have to decide if you're willing to pay the freight or not. I'll get your artillery moved for you, but I want a grand for doing it."

"A grand!"

"You heard right. One grand. Cash. In hundred-dollar bills. New money, so it's easy to roll."

"A grand! That's robbery!"

"Well, that's why I'm here. Take it or leave it."

Silence again. Dwyer pulled a pouch and paper out of his shirt pocket and rolled himself a cigarette. Hanley watched the wrinkled, yellowed fingers work with a deftness that belied their age. Not a shred of tobacco was dropped, not a millimeter of paper was left unfilled. Except for its twisted end, the cigarette looked tailor-made. Probably been rolling them for fifty years, Max Hanley thought. There wouldn't be any bargaining with this old thief.

"Okay," Hanley said at last. "It's a deal. Ten hundred-dollar bills. New money." He fixed Dwyer in a cold stare. "But you'd better come through, old man."

Dwyer grunted. "I been coming through since before you was born, boy."

The next day Dwyer began setting up the operation.

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As a lifer with years of good time behind him, Dwyer was employed in one of the least restrictive jobs in the prison—inmate clerk to the deputy warden in charge of administration. The DWA, as he was called, was second in charge of all aspects of running the prison with the exception of security, which was under the DWC—the Deputy Warden-Custody. Convicts like Dwyer, who worked for either deputy warden, were called "white caps" because, literally, they wore a white cap instead of a blue one. The white cap was a pass which allowed the wearer to go anywhere within the walls except the armory or armed-guard stations.

Dwyer himself was in charge of supplies. His primary job was to collect the monthly supply requisitions from all departments of the prison, check them against stock on hand in the storage warehouse, compile a list of items that were out of stock and needed to be ordered, type the list, and give it to the DWA for approval. Once approved, the list was forwarded to the procurement office where the supplies were ordered and shipped directly to the prison. As the items arrived, Dwyer would check them off his list and the warehouse clerk would either stock them or distribute them.

For Dwyer it was a perfect setup. He could come and go as he pleased, pass the time of day with friends and not be hassled for it, get into the dining hall ahead of the crowd, take a nap during the day when he was tired, steal extra codeine tablets from the dispensary when his arthritis got too painful in the winter, and in general make life as easy for himself as he could. He even had an arrangement with one of the hospital orderlies to supply him with a pint of medicinal brandy every thirty days so that he could mellow out on rainy nights when he started thinking about the lost years.

When he was beginning to set up the operation for Max Hanley's crashout, the first thing Dwyer did was pull the most recent requisition from the dispensary and take it over to Edwards, the civilian male nurse who worked for the prison doctor.

"Excuse me, Mr. Edwards," he said deferentially, "but on this here order you've got down a thousand cotton swabs. But the warehouse says you just got *five* thousand on an order last month. Warehouse wants to know if it's a mistake."

Edwards frowned. "Five thousand? Last month? Doesn't sound right to me." He swiveled around and took a folder from a filing cabinet. "Here's last month's order. No cotton swabs on it at all." He handed the folder to Dwyer.

Dwyer shook his head. "That warehouse. Can't get anything

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straight. I sure wish everybody would run their departments like you do, Mr. Edwards. Sure make my job a lot easier. I'm gonna make a note on this order that they'd better get those cotton swabs over here in a hurry. Have you got a red pencil I can use?"

Edwards opened a drawer. "Here you are."

"Thanks." He handed the folder back to Edwards. "You'll want to put this back in your file."

Edwards swiveled around again to return the folder to the filing cabinet. When he did, Dwyer reached into the still-open desk drawer and noiselessly tore the top sheet from a pad of blank passes pre-signed by the prison doctor. By the time Edwards was facing him again, Dwyer had the stolen pass in his pocket and was scribbling his note with Edwards' red pencil.

When he left the dispensary, Dwyer crossed the upper yard to the education building where convicts went to school to earn elementary and high school diplomas. When he got inside, he looked at the hall clock and saw that it was ten past the hour. In another five minutes, classes would change. He sat on the stairs to wait. The roving guard on duty in the ed building noticed him and walked down to him. " 'Lo, Frank," the guard said.

" 'Morning, Mr. Tracy," said Dwyer.

"Resting up for lunch?"

"No, just waitin' for classes to change, Mr. Tracy. I have to see somebody about the school's order for blackboard chalk. I got an order here for twenty boxes, but the warehouse says the school just got *fifty* boxes last month. So I have to ask Charley Davis about it. But I thought I'd wait five minutes. That way I don't interrupt the class."

"Good idea," said Tracy. "How's your arthritis lately?"

" 'Bout the same, Mr. Tracy. Doc says it probably won't ever improve. Says it's a result of all those years in the dampness that I done on Alcatraz. How about you—arches still bothering you?"

"Yeah," Tracy said resignedly. "It's these damn steel floors—no give to them. I put in for tower duty so I won't have to do so much walking, but I haven't heard anything yet. You and me just weren't cut out for prison, Dwyer."

"You got that right, Mr. Tracy," the old convict said with a grin.

The bell rang and convicts began to stream out of the rooms. Tracy walked on down the corridor and Dwyer entered the civics classroom of a convict teacher named Charley Davis. "Hello, you two-bit old bank robber," said Davis, looking up from his desk.

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"Top of the morning, you third-rate forger," Dwyer replied. "How's everything in the world of lower education?"

"Terrible," Davis said, pulling a sour face. "The only ones that come to school any more are the militants, and they just come to argue about the system and get out of work. I'm glad I only have three more years to do—I don't think I could stand it longer than that." He glanced at the door to make sure they were alone. "What's on your mind?"

Dwyer slipped him the stolen pass, along with a pad of blanks he had taken from stationery supplies that morning. "I need the signature copied on three of these."

"Usual scale?"

Dwyer nodded. "Five cartons per. Total of fifteen cartons."

"Deal," Charley Davis said.

Dwyer left the education building and walked over to the shoe shop. Gus Monetti, a former bigtime labor racketeer, now long forgotten in prison, was working the number one stitching machine just inside the door. Dwyer caught his attention and motioned for him to come outside. Monetti finished stitching the leather upper on the machine and turned off the power. He waved a pack of cigarettes at the civilian shop foreman, got a nod in return, and stepped outside.

"Hello, *paisan*," he said to Dwyer.

"Hello, Augustus. How's the cobbler business?"

"We're keeping busy," Monetti said, lighting a cigarette. "Just finishing an order of kid's sizes for the state orphanage. Doing 'em real good, using the best leather we got in stock, flat-stitching everything, lining the insides. Hell, those orphans are gonna have better shoes than rich kids wear." Monetti grinned. "Next week we start an order of boots for the national guard. We'll do a good job on them, too. Loose stitches. Exposed nails. Unfinished linings down in the toes."

"Way to go," Dwyer said, sharing his smile. Then he got serious. "Say, Gus, you got anything coming in through your shop? Any kind of pipeline at all?"

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"I think you might have. Pretty soon. A small package that'll have to be moved over to the machine-shop area. You be interested in doing it?"

"For what?" Monetti asked.

Dwyer shrugged. "What do you want?"

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"What I'd really like to get is a cell change. But I don't want to seem pushy. I don't know if moving a package for you is important enough for a favor like that."

"It's important enough. What's the problem with your cell?"

"I'm on three tier in south block. They been moving a lot of young cons in there lately. They cut up and horseplay around, do a lot of yelling between cells—it's too hectic for me any more. After the noise of this shoe shop all day, I need some peace and quiet at night, know what I mean?"

"Got you. How about if I find you a place in north block, where I live? They're mostly old codgers over there, like you and me."

"That'd be terrif, *paisan.*"

"I'll try to get you down on the flats so you won't have all them stairs to climb." Dwyer patted the ex-racketeer on the shoulder. "I'll let you know about the package."

Dwyer went back to his desk in the cubbyhole across the hall from the DWA's office. He hung his white cap on a hook on the wall and did a couple of hours' work on the supply lists he had received so far that month. After he was sure he had been seen hard at work by the DWA and the DWA's civilian assistant, he put his cap back on, picked up a clipboard with some forms on it, and walked over to the opposite side of the administration building where the deputy warden-custody had his office.

The DWC had an inmate clerk named Will Redmon. He was a whip-thin black man from the south side of Chicago. Twenty years earlier he had been a collector for a numbers operation in the Troop Street projects. There was a rumor that the operation was being cased for a takeover by some outsiders who had been snooping around. Redmon and another collector were assigned to do a number on one of them as an example. They caught one in a project building basement and beat him senseless. He died from a brain hemorrhage.

Then they found out he was not a rival at all; he was a member of an anti-organized-crime squad working undercover. Redmon's partner was shot and killed in the ensuing manhunt. Redmon's own people turned him in. He was tried, and because at that time there was no death penalty, he was sentenced to life.

" 'Morning, Mr. Redmon," said Dwyer, entering a cubbyhole much like his own.

" 'Morning, Mr. Dwyer," said Redmon. "Take a chair."

"Thank you."

Dwyer and Redmon were not friends, but they were not enemies

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either. The precisely structured social strata of the prison prevented the former, and their own intelligence kept them from the latter. Redmon did not affiliate himself with the Black Muslims, the Black Guerrilla Family, the Crips, or any of the other organized black groups within the walls, and Dwyer had always avoided association with the Aryan Brotherhood, the Bikers, the Revolutionary Union, and other white cliques; but even though they remained individually neutral, both knew they still had to respect the lines drawn by those groups, and by the Mexican Mafia, the *Nuestra Familia*, Satan's Few, the Midnight Specials, and the rest of the prison gangs. So Dwyer and Redmon conducted business when it was beneficial for both of them to do so, but they kept it quasi-formal at all times.

"What can I do for you today, Mr. Dwyer?" asked Redmon.

"I'm interested in a cell change for a friend of mine," Dwyer said.

A slight smile crossed Redmon's lips. "Playing cupid, Mr. Dwyer?"

"No, nothing like that," Dwyer replied with a chuckle. He explained why Gus Monetti wanted out of south block.

"Well, that's understandable," Redmon said. "Most of those young cons coming in now don't know how to conduct themselves at all. Let's see what Monetti's sheet looks like." He opened a file drawer and glanced briefly at the top page of Gus Monetti's custody record. "Yeah, he's okay. No disciplines, no restrictions. Where would you like to put him?"

Dwyer and Redmon worked out the location. Monetti would be transferred to his new cell on Sunday. Dwyer would slip Redmon a fifty-dollar bill on Monday.

"Thanks for your help, Mr. Redmon," said Dwyer.

"Not at all, Mr. Dwyer, not at all. Call again."

After dropping off the clipboard at his cubbyhole, Dwyer walked across the big yard to the dining room. He was too early for the main line but that did not bother him, not as long as he was wearing his white cap. Taking a tray, he went behind the steam table and served himself. He took an extra ladle of creamed chipped beef and extra butter beans, but he skipped the canned pears and carrot jello. Picking up a biscuit and coffee from the end of the counter, he crossed the near-empty hall to a corner table where Leo Ripley, the inmate laundry foreman, was eating alone.

Ripley was a wife-murderer who would have been out years earlier if he had not also killed a fellow prisoner in an argument over a book in the prison library.

Now he would probably never get out. He had a pass to eat early

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because he tended to become aggressive in crowd situations.

"Mind if I sit with you, Leo?" Dwyer asked. "It's business."

Ripley squinted at him for a moment. He liked eating alone, he had become accustomed to it; everybody knew that and usually gave him a wide berth; but if it was business, an exception could be made. Ripley nodded and Dwyer sat down.

"I need three sets of bakery whites," Dwyer said. "Pants and shirts, no caps. One set medium, two sets large."

"What for?" Ripley asked.

"I can't tell you, Leo. I'm only the middle man."

Ripley locked eyes with him. "A break. It's got to be a break. Nobody's gonna wear clothes they ain't supposed to wear unless they're pulling a break. I want in."

Dwyer shook his head. "It's not my show, Leo. I've got no say about anything. Like I told you, I'm an employee, working for a fee."

"Then take a message to whoever you're working for. Either I get included or no whites."

"I don't carry those kind of messages, Leo. All I do is what I get paid to do. I'll get the whites somewhere else." Dwyer picked up his tray to leave.

"Wait a minute," Ripley said. "Let me think about it for a minute." He shoveled a few spoonsful of carrot jello into his mouth while Dwyer waited. Finally he shrugged. "A break that starts in the bakery don't have no chance anyway. Can you get me some good booze? Not pruno or any of that bootleg hootch they make in the kitchen. I mean good stuff."

"I can get bonded brandy."

"I want a quart for each set of whites."

Dwyer thought about it. That was his entire supply for the next six months. A long time to go dry. Of course, he could always go back to pruno himself; it was better than nothing. Lord knows he had drunk enough of it over the years, at Alcatraz, Folsom, Joliet, Angola—

"It's a deal if you'll take a pint for each set—a pint a month. That's the best I can do."

"I'll take it."

Dwyer nodded. "Keep the whites handy. I'll let you know when and where to deliver." He picked up his tray again. "I know you like to eat alone, Leo," he said, and walked away.

That night in his cell, Dwyer reflected on Leo Ripley's instant

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prognosis of the break: *A break that starts in the bakery don't have no chance anyway.* Yet he knew that Max Hanley was no fool. Hanley had engineered some very big bank robberies; he *had* to know the value of careful planning, and he *must* have weighed the odds against every conceivable thing that could go wrong. Maybe, Dwyer thought, he and the other two on the break, whoever they were, intended to take hostages—the warden and some visitors inspecting the bakery, perhaps.

But that didn't make sense. Hanley had been in long enough to know that the prison had a firm rule on hostages—they were considered dead the moment they were taken. No consideration could be given to their safety. In the escape attempt of 1956 five correctional officers had been sacrificed; in 1971, four. So Hanley would know better than to try to bull his way out with hostages.

Besides, that wasn't his style. He used surprise moves and lightning performance in his bank operations; no reason why he should not work the same way in a break.

The next day during noon yard time, Dwyer passed the word to Hanley that everything was set. He was caught off guard when Hanley told him to put the operation in motion the very next morning.

"Tomorrow?" Dwyer asked, surprised.

"Any reason why not?" Hanley asked back, instantly suspicious.

"None at all," Dwyer assured him. "I just didn't think you'd be ready this soon. But no sweat. How do you want it handled?"

"Have the three passes delivered to my cell before lockdown tonight. Have the three sets of whites stashed in the refrigerator locker on the kitchen loading dock by nine o'clock tomorrow morning. And have my package transferred from the shoe shop to the sheet-metal waste bin by the same time."

"Where's the package?"

"In an unopened barrel of shoe paste. A sealed plastic bag about four inches under the surface. The barrel has a green dot stenciled on the shipping label."

Dwyer nodded. "Got my money?"

Hanley took a paperback novel from his hip pocket and handed it to Dwyer. The old convict thumbed through it. Ten new one-hundred-dollar bills were inserted at various places between the pages. "Okay," he told Hanley. "Everything'll be ready." He started to leave.

"Aren't you gonna wish me good luck?" Hanley asked tonelessly.

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Dwyer paused and looked steadily at him. "Make your own luck. That's what I've always done." And he walked away.

Before the break went down the next morning, Dwyer had figured it out. It came to him as he was putting his part of the operation into motion. He got the forged passes from Charley Davis and slipped them to the tier tender where Hanley celled. The tier tender would pass them to Hanley as he picked up outgoing mail that the cons put on their cell bars. As Dwyer was on his way to see Gus Monetti, he figured out the first stage of the break. Hanley and his two partners would all check out for sick call the next morning. That way, by meeting at the dispensary, the three of them could get together from the various locations where they worked. Then they would use the forged passes to get them from the dispensary to the kitchen.

At the shoe shop Dwyer made arrangements with Gus Monetti to retrieve the plastic package from the shoe-paste barrel and transfer it to the sheet-metal shop waste bin. That gave Dwyer the second stage. As Hanley and his partners went from the dispensary to the kitchen, they would pause briefly behind the sheet-metal shop and pick up their guns. Now, Dwyer thought, they're armed and heading for the kitchen.

He kept figuring as he left Gus Monetti and went over to the laundry to see Leo Ripley. Giving Leo instructions about the white bakers' uniforms, Dwyer guessed at the third stage. Hanley and his partners would arrive at the kitchen, go back to the refrigerator locker on the loading dock, and change into the whites. But what then?

His errands finished, Dwyer went over and sat on the bleachers to think. Three armed cons wearing bakers' whites, in the refrigerator locker just after nine o'clock in the morning. Where do they go from there? They could mingle with the kitchen workers, but what would that get them? They might make their way to the officers' dining room and take a few hostages—but Dwyer had already decided that Hanley was too smart for that. Maybe they intended to go out on the dock and commandeer a truck, try to crash out through the front gate—

No, wait a minute! Dwyer's weathered old face lighted up. They were going to commandeer a truck, all right, but not to ram the front gate. They were going to take over the *dairy* truck that delivered milk from the honor farm. Sure! It was a natural! Stick up the

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shotgun guard and change places with the three trusties who wore *white* dairy workers uniforms. Perfect!

The tower guard at the gate would see the same thing he saw every day—the dairy truck going back out, carrying one guard and three white-clad trusties. Hanley and his partners could ride through the gate without firing a shot, while the real trusties shivered back in the refrigerator locker with that day's delivery of milk. Yeah. That had to be it.

Dwyer nodded his head in admiration.

Beautiful.

Max Hanley's break ended five minutes after the dairy truck got out the front gate.

A roadblock of state police prevented access to the main highway, while a cordon of radio cars fell in behind the truck to keep it from turning back. Machine guns were trained on them from both sides of the road. Hanley and his partners never had a chance. By noon they were in the hole, charged with escape, kidnaping the trusty guard, and unlawful possession of firearms by felons.

The prison was locked down tight. Everyone who could have even remotely been connected with the break was scheduled for an interrogation session with the deputy warden-custody. Dwyer was called in on the third day. Leo Ripley, Charley Davis, and Gus Monetti were already seated on the bench outside the DWC's office when Dwyer got there. Ripley was clenching his jaw and Monetti was sweating. Only Charley Davis was cool. "We got anything to worry about?" he asked Dwyer under his breath.

"I don't think so," Dwyer answered, speaking to all three of them. "They're checking every forger in the joint, Charley, so you're just routine. Gus, there's a rumor around that traces of shoe paste were found on the guns, so everybody in your shop will be suspect. But there's no reason for them to single you out, not with your good record. Leo, they're gonna figure those whites came from the laundry, but it could have been anybody that works there. As long as nobody saw you put the whites in that refrigerator, you should be okay."

Just then the office door opened and a guard said, "All right, Dwyer, you're next."

Cap in hand, Dwyer entered the DWC's office and stood in front of the desk. The DWC waited until the guard left before speaking. Then he smiled and said, "Another good job, Dwyer."

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"Thank you, sir." Dwyer handed him the ten new one-hundred-dollar bills. "Will you put this in my account in town?"

"Glad to," said the DWC, taking the money. "Well, a thousand dollars. You're going to have quite a nice little nest egg in that account when you get out."

"When do you think that'll be, sir?"

"Shouldn't be too much longer. Not the way you've been helping the administration these past seven or eight years. I'll see what I can do at the next parole hearing." The DWC stood up. "Well, we don't want to keep you in here too long—your friends might become suspicious. Is there anything I can do for you, Dwyer?"

"Yes, sir, there is. One of the men waiting outside is Ripley, number 117230. I think I'd like for him to take the fall for furnishing the whites. You can put the word out that somebody saw him stashing the bakers' uniforms in the refrigerator. I'd appreciate it if he could be transferred to the prison downstate."

"All right, Dwyer. Be glad to accommodate you."

Leaving the office, Dwyer put on a tense expression. He threw a tight wink to Davis, Monetti, and Ripley in the hall. It was a wink that told them he had stood up to the DWC and refused to answer any questions. That he had lived up to his reputation as a top con, a lifer.

After Dwyer passed them, he smiled to himself. He was glad he would not have to give up his brandy to Leo Ripley for the next three months.

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

JACK RITCHIE

When our friend, Detective Sergeant Henry H. Turnbuckle of the Milwaukee Police Department, investigates a case, especially a murder case, he examines minutely the implications of every iota of evidence, every jot and tittle of non-evidence, and theorizes exhaustively on the circumstances of the crime and the identity of the criminal. But this time has our Henry H. met his match in relentless reasoning? . . .

WIN SOME, LOSE SOME

by JACK RITCHIE

I rubbed my hands. "Ah, what have we here?"

"A body," Ralph said.

We did indeed. It was that of Paula Washburn, age 36, weight possibly a bit over 130.

She lay prone on the carpeted floor of the walk-in vault-safe. Just beyond her right hand lay a pearl necklace and two diamond rings. Her body had been discovered at 4:30 P.M. by her stepdaughter, Marianne, when she had opened the vault to take another admiring look at her law diploma.

The vault was perhaps eight feet deep, seven wide, and seven high. I supposed that, if it became necessary, I could resort to mathematics and determine just how long a person would survive locked in a room of that size; in this case, however, I did not think that would be necessary. There were other things to consider.

On the far wall of the vault ranged a bank of various-sized safety-deposit boxes. To one side stood three four-door filing cabinets.

"Ralph," I said, "we are here faced with three possibilities."

"All I see are two. Either she got accidentally locked inside or

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somebody did the locking on purpose."

I chuckled good-naturedly. "Have you considered suicide?"

"Not lately, Henry. Who's going to commit suicide by locking herself in a vault? It isn't a neat way to go."

"Ralph, you, as others, are guilty of a common misconception on the question of asphyxiation in vaults. You seem to think that the ending would entail a desperate gasping for air. *Au contraire.* As the percentage of oxygen in the air decreased, one would simply become drowsy, lapse into unconsciousness, and then glide into death."

"You think she might have committed suicide?"

"By no means, Ralph. I was merely touching all bases. If she came down here with the intention of committing suicide, would she just stand there clutching her jewelry—possibly for hours—until she keeled over? No, it would be the normal thing to at least put them down somewhere. On the filing cabinets, for example. Or in the pocket of her dressing gown." I shook my head. "No, Ralph, she did not commit suicide."

I went to the bank of safety-deposit boxes and tested them once again. They were all locked. So were the filing cabinets.

Ralph watched me. "All right, Henry, so maybe she came down here to put away her jewels for the night and the door swung shut behind her and trapped her inside?"

"No, Ralph. As we have seen and tested, the vault door is quite heavy and not at all free-swinging. It requires at least some continuous effort either to open or to shut it. In short, it cannot accidentally drift shut."

Ralph agreed. "Which leaves us with murder. Let's talk to the suspects." There were three of those and they waited out of earshot at the farther end of the rather large drawing room.

James Washburn, husband of the deceased, age in the early fifties: tall, distinguished, open-countenanced, and deep in thought. Marianne, his daughter: small, raven-haired, wary eyes behind shell glasses. And Ronald Goodcart, a distant cousin of the deceased and a weekend guest at the house. Ronald was in his early forties, had black hair, a thin black mustache, and the general mien of a cad.

All three were quite solemn, none of them exhibiting undue grief at the death of Paula Washburn. They had, of course, undergone some preliminary questioning by the uniformed officers who arrived first at the scene. Ralph and I now moved in for in-depth interrogation.

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I introduced Ralph and then myself. "Detective Sergeant Henry H. Turnbuckle, MPD." I waited for signs of recognition, but they withheld them.

I regarded James Washburn. "How long were you and the deceased married?"

"Three years. About that."

"When and where did you last see your wife alive?"

"In our bedroom last night at about eleven thirty. She suddenly remembered her jewelry and told me she was going back downstairs to put it into the vault for the night."

I nodded judiciously. "It is now five thirty in the afternoon of the following day and the body was discovered less than one hour ago. How can you explain that?"

"Nobody opened the vault until then."

"I mean you hadn't seen your wife for approximately eighteen hours and yet you never thought to sound some kind of an alarm?"

"I didn't know she was locked in the vault."

I smiled thinly. "Your wife leaves your bedroom, telling you that she is going to put her jewelry into the vault, and she doesn't return? Didn't that make you wonder just a smidgen where she might be?"

"Not really. We sleep in twin beds. After she left the room, I closed my eyes and immediately fell asleep. I didn't wake until nine this morning."

"But surely when you glanced at her bed this morning and found it unoccupied, didn't you begin to wonder where she was?"

"No. I thought she'd just gotten up early and gone downstairs. Paula usually has no more than a cup of coffee for breakfast and then is off. She led a rather independent life and usually didn't bother to let people know where she was going or for how long. I've gone entire weekends without ever seeing her."

"Who discovered the body?"

Marianne Washburn now spoke. "I did. At about four thirty this afternoon when I opened the vault to take another look at my sheepskin. Paula lay there on the floor inside, quite dead."

"Your sheepskin?"

"My law degree. *Magna cum laude,* and stuff. I'm going to have it framed when I open my office, but for now I keep it in the vault and peek at it every now and then. The vault is our storage place for valuable things that are smaller than a bread box. Jewelry, cash, papers, records, mementoes, and new diplomas."

"Isn't there any way to open the vault from the inside? Or at least

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an alarm button which a person could press if he were imprisoned inside?"

"I'm afraid not. The vault was built into the house nearly fifty years ago. Today I suppose a vault must incorporate all kinds of safety features, but in those days they weren't so particular."

"The vault is opened by a combination lock?"

"Yes."

"Who has the combination? Besides you?"

"Dad does. Paula did." She looked at Ronald Goodcart.

He shook his head. "No. Why should I?"

I spoke to Marianne. "When you found Mrs. Washburn, did you touch her, move or take anything?"

"No." Marianne sighed. "Poor Paula. It's obvious that when she went downstairs to put away her jewelry the door of the vault accidentally shut behind her, trapping her inside."

I smiled. "My dear young lady, I have inspected and tested the vault door thoroughly. No vagrant breath of air could set it in motion."

She considered that, then sighed again. "I was just trying to protect Paula's memory. She was so depressed lately. Her health, you know. She had this bad heart. Everybody knows it. Morose and downhearted. Brooding all the time. She must have decided to take her own life."

"Nonsense," Ronald Goodcart said. "Paula was quite cheerful. Vibrant. Besides, she would have left a note."

Marianne regarded him with disdain. "Suicides do not necessarily leave notes. Besides, it could have been a sudden impulse and she discovered too late that she didn't have a pencil and paper with her."

"Ah, yes," I said. "Actually the most interesting aspect of this entire case is the fact that the victim did not leave a note or any *other* communication behind. It is the very crux of this matter."

Ralph was impressed. "You've gotten to the crux already, Henry?"

I nodded. "The body of Paula Washburn was examined by us, was it not, Ralph? And what did we find in the pocket of her dressing gown?"

"Just a small handkerchief."

"Exactly." I turned back to the suspects. "Let us suppose that Paula Washburn came downstairs to put away her jewelry. She opened the vault door by dialing the combination. And *then* what? *Where,* inside the vault, did she intend to put this jewelry?"

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Washburn volunteered. "She stored her jewelry in one of the safety-deposit boxes."

I nodded encouragement. "And how did she intend to get *into* that safety-deposit box?"

"With her key, of course."

"Ah, but we found *no* key on her person, or on the floor, or anywhere else in the vault. And all the safety-deposit boxes *and* the filing cabinets are locked. So where did she intend to put thisjewelry if she had no key with her?"

Marianne was still trying to sell suicide. "It's obvious, isn't it? She simply forgot the key. It was the last straw, so to speak. Everything had been going wrong all day and she had a headache too. So in one mad moment of frustration and despair, she pulled the vault door shut after her and said goodbye to the world."

I did not buy. "No, Paula Washburn did *not* forget her key. Someone *else* did. And that was the person who closed the vault door behind her."

I had been expecting a gasp or two, but they restrained themselves.

"Ralph," I said, "were there any marks of violence on the victim's body? Anything to suggest that she had been shot, stabbed, bludgeoned, strangled? Any discoloration or suspicious odor which might suggest poisoning?"

"Nothing. The coroner won't get around to the autopsy until after he's had supper, but he says that asphyxiation is a good bet."

I agreed. "And now we come to the poser, the conundrum, the puzzle. Why did Paula Washburn leave no note, no message, no communication of any kind?"

I smiled about. "Suppose that you had just been locked in a vault and knew it had been no accident. Wouldn't you at least have tried to tell the world who locked you in there?"

"Maybe she didn't know," Ralph said.

"A possibility, Ralph. However, even if she *didn't* know who had locked her in, wouldn't she at least have left some kind of information behind indicating that she *had* been locked in and that it hadn't been accidental?"

"She lost her head and panicked," Ralph said. "And it just didn't come to her mind."

"No, Ralph. While panic might be the first and natural reaction, I find it impossible to believe that she could have sustained that panic for three, four, five, or whatever hours it would have taken

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her to collapse. At some point during that time she would surely have recovered enough aplomb to at least leave a message about her suspicions or certainties. And yet she left none. Why not?"

Ralph speculated. "Maybe she *did* leave a message, Henry. A note. But the murderer waited a few hours until he was certain she was dead. And then he opened the vault, pocketed the note, and closed the vault again."

"Possible, Ralph. However, that flimsy theory depends on the victim just happening to have a writing implement and paper in her pocket. Hardly likely, I should think."

I allowed a pause. "*However*, in such an emergency couldn't she have found some other instrument to write with or a surface to put it on?"

I smiled. "The *diamond* rings. Surely it would have occurred to her to use her diamond rings as writing implements and she could have used any plain surface—the sides or the tops of the filing cabinets, for instance—as her slate? She could very easily have scratched the name of her murderer, or simply indicated that someone unknown had locked her in there. And yet she didn't do this. Why not?"

There was silence.

Ralph frowned. "She was unconscious? The murderer knocked her out before he put her in there?"

"But we found no cranial bruises or injury sufficient to produce such unconsciousness. Besides, even if she were unconscious before being put in there, what guarantee did the murderer have that she would *remain* unconscious until she died by asphyxiation."

Ralph tried again. "She was drugged. That would have held her until she suffocated."

"But surely the murderer must have known that, under the mysterious circumstances of her death, an autopsy would be performed and the presence of drugs discovered in her body." I shook my head. "No, Ralph, the murderer was not the least bit worried about her leaving a message or drugs being found in her system because Paula Washburn was *already dead* when she was locked in the vault."

There were moments of awed silence at my relentless reasoning and then Ralph said, "She didn't die of asphyxiation?"

"Ah, Ralph, but she *did* die of asphyxiation. That was the whole point in putting her body into the vault."

I assumed a grim expression. "She was asphyxiated, but *not* in the vault. And she was put into the vault to cover up the fact that

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she *was* asphyxiated, but somewhere else. And considering what she was wearing at the time of her death—that is, pajamas and a dressing gown—would not that lead us back to one particular room in the house?"

I turned to stare at James Washburn. "Perhaps a plastic bag slipped over her head? But more likely the old-fashioned pillow?"

James Washburn sighed heavily, looked utterly resigned, and opened his mouth to speak.

Marianne spoke first. "I see it all so clearly now. At eleven thirty last night Paula left father's bedroom, telling him she was going downstairs to put away her jewelry. But instead she slipped down the hall to Ronald's bedroom for a tryst, an assignation, a rendezvous."

Goodcart blinked. "She did *not.*"

Marianne ignored him. "The two of them had a lover's quarrel. Harsh, bitter words were exchanged. She told him their affair was finished."

Ronald protested. "It never began."

Marianne swept on. "In his moment of rage he seized a pillow and smothered Paula. Then, realizing he had to cover up the crime, he carried her body down to the vault, hoping to make it appear that she had died there accidentally."

Ronald had begun to perspire. "But I don't even know the combination of the vault."

She smiled insincerely in his direction. "We have only your untrustworthy word for that. *Everybody* knows that Paula was a complete witch—if I pronounced that word correctly. She continually flittered from hither to yon and last night you were the nearest hither."

I shook my head. "A noble effort, Miss Washburn, but sheer logic indicates that a woman would not blatantly tell her husband she was going to put her jewelry into the vault and then instead sashay down the hall to an assignation. Her husband might not innocently fall asleep at her departure. After a time he might even come looking for her. No, it is much more logical to assume that if she intended any such action, she would *first* wait until she was certain her husband had fallen asleep before she ventured out of the bedroom."

I took my celluloid card out of my breast coat pocket.

Ralph stopped me. "What are you doing, Henry?"

"I'm about to read Mr. Washburn his rights."

"Why?"

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"The Supreme Court insists on it."

Ralph took me aside. "Henry, you know and I know that Washburn killed his wife. Everybody in this room does. But what *solid* proof do we have? I'm talking about things that people can see and touch. People like district attorneys who have to get the indictments or the judges who have to issue them."

"Ralph, the man seems almost eager to confess."

"Henry, I doubt that his daughter, the brand-new lawyer, will allow him to confess to anything."

Marianne had edged close enough to hear us. She nodded and smiled sweetly.

I experienced moral indignation. "Ralph, we have here a cold-blooded murder. This man held a pillow over the face of his wife until she was asphyxiated. Seven or eight minutes, assuming that there was no leakage of air. But probably longer."

James Washburn had joined us. "Seven or eight minutes? But it wasn't anywhere near—"

Marianne quickly put her hand over his mouth. "Suppose," she said, "suppose this somebody who wielded the pillow merely wanted to stop the victim's vituperation and hysteria. He had no intention at all of murdering her. He just wanted to shut her up for a while. He held the pillow over her head for perhaps one minute."

Washburn freed his mouth. "Maybe not even that long."

"Maybe less," Marianne said swiftly. "And when Paula ceased to struggle, he removed the pillow from her face and was utterly astounded to discover she was dead."

Washburn nodded eagerly.

Marianne glared at him for a moment, then continued, "And suppose that since he had no conception at all as to the amount of time it takes to asphyxiate anyone with a pillow, he merely *assumed* he had killed her? Actually she had died of a heart attack, not of asphyxiation. And so, succumbing to perfectly understandable panic, he carried her body down to the vault and tried to make it appear as though she had accidentally locked herself inside."

I folded my arms. "Even assuming that is what occurred, in this state if a person dies as the result of stress during a hostile act, it would be considered at least manslaughter."

Marianne smiled. "But can you *prove* even manslaughter? And there will be *no* confession. And if this person were somehow convicted—which is highly unlikely since thirty-seven character witnesses will testify in his behalf—he will probably—considering his

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unblemished past and his standing in the community—be put on probation for six months. Would you cause all that trouble just to stick some poor unfortunate soul with a six-months' probation?"

There was respectful silence while I stared out of a window.

Finally I put my celluloid card back into my pocket. "Ralph, my mother cried for three days when she discovered that I had joined the Milwaukee Police Department. She was right."

"Now, now, Henry," Ralph said. "We win some and we lose some." He turned to the others. "Does anyone have a glass of sherry?"

"Not here, Ralph," I said firmly.

Ralph embarrassed me further by explaining. "Whenever one of Henry's cases doesn't go just right, he finds that a glass or two of sherry helps to buck him up."

Ronald Goodcart folded his arms. "I'll bet he drinks a lot."

That remark was entirely uncalled for. I consume perhaps one bottle of sherry a year. Well, maybe two.

I declined their sherry and we left.

At eight that evening the coroner phoned me at my apartment to let me know that the autopsy had shown that Paula Washburn had died of a heart attack, not of asphyxiation.

At nine my door buzzer sounded.

It was Marianne. "Do you realize that you are the only Turnbuckle in the telephone directory?"

I sighed. "I am the only Turnbuckle who ever left Sheboygan for more than a weekend."

She held up what looked like a bottle in a paper bag. "I thought I'd drop in and see if it's possible to cheer you up."

It was.

"Q"

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a *NEW* novelet by

WILLIAM BANKIER

The highly successful plastic surgeon from California, dissatisfied with life, was seeking a new career. In Brighton, England, he met two women, two entirely different women—"a young girl with astonishing silver hair" and a mature woman, "not really his type," with taffy hair and dressed in tweed. Both women were to change the face of Mark Whitman's life, each in her own fashion . . .

A WOMAN WAITS FOR ME

by WILLIAM BANKIER

The pub was almost deserted. Not many people inhabited the Brighton seafront on a cloudy day in early April. Mark Whitman left his bench by the window, walked to the bar, and asked for another bourbon and water.

The feeling that he had made a fool of himself was strong today. If he could not achieve something in England soon, he would probably end up back in California with more egg on his face than a chicken farmer in a hurricane. But not necessarily. He could easily afford to drink himself to death. Or he could walk a hundred yards down the shingle, shed his clothes, and trudge into the breakers like Fredric March in "A Star Is Born." If he did, his wife back home would not announce bravely to the world, "This is *Mrs.* Mark Whitman." She would say something like, "The idiot finally got what he was after."

Somebody was having trouble with the doors. Back on his bench, Whitman saw why when a woman struggled in leading on a chain the biggest Great Dane he had ever seen. It was charcoal-gray and as tall as a Shetland pony. She caught his eye and they exchanged

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sympathetic smiles. "He's taking me for my walk," she said.

"I'm glad he brought you in here."

"Thank you."

Whitman was more surprised than she was by his flirtatious remark. He had managed a few interesting pickups since arriving, all in London, but this mature woman was not really his type. Her taffy hair was permed in an old-fashioned style he thought of as "dancing teacher." She had a large plain face that he assessed professionally: no lift needed, a little work around the eyelids would help, some padding in the chin. The dog, however, was hopeless, its face draped in enough skin to make another Dane or a couple of terriers.

"I'm off to the bar," Whitman said, tossing back the bourbon. "Can I bring you something?"

"Yes, please. I'd like a gin and tonic."

When he came back carrying the drinks, she was settled in with her tweed jacket unbuttoned revealing a full but not flamboyant chest. Her sturdy build, her clear-eyed look, and her confident accent suggested to Whitman that this was a girl who had done well at field hockey for her private school during the war.

"What's the dog's name?" Whitman said. "Cheers."

"Cheers. His name is Giant."

The animal was stretched out proudly like one of Landseer's lions in Trafalgar Square. "Nice boy, Giant. I hope you never run into a dog named Jack."

They exchanged introductions. Then they began chatting and he learned that her name, Brenda Belziel, was French. She was the widow of an officer in the Free French Army, a Colonel who had walked not far behind le Grand Charles himself when de Gaulle returned to Paris. No, he had not been killed in the war, nothing as heroic as that. Brenda had only met Belziel in 1960 when he was serving with a trade commission in London. They married, she for the first time, he for the third. His death had occurred accidentally a year and a half ago, as the result of a fall in the bathtub.

"I'm still living it down, I can assure you," she said, insisting on going to the bar for the next round of drinks. Giant plodded after her like an animated exhibit from the Museum of Natural History. When she came back and put Whitman's bourbon in front of him, she went on to say, "Brighton is a gossipy town. I'm known as the Black Widow by some of the nastier types. They can't believe I didn't kill him. I *have* ended up with a house and a lot of money, but still—"

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Whitman was beginning to feel secure inside his protective skin of whiskey. Her legs, which he had inspected as she went to the bar, were as healthy as the rest of her. Definitely a hockey player this one, a woman of charm and humor, but not the type to be given more than the story of his life. A game of gin rummy might be the limit of their intimacy.

"You're an interesting man, Mr. Whitman," she said. "When I reveal I'm a wealthy widow, most of them become nervous, or extra polite, or sexy. But you didn't turn a hair."

"Maybe it's because I earn more than I could spend in two lifetimes."

"My guess is you're Dr. Mark Whitman."

"Take the prize."

"Do you specialize?"

"Plastic surgery." His occupation never failed to raise a woman's interest.

"How fascinating. That's quite a fad in your country, I believe."

"More than a fad in California. It's becoming a way of life. If we ever lower the price, automate it somehow, it'll become like color television—everybody will have one."

"Meanwhile, you like things the way they are."

"I'm doing very nicely, thank you. No complaints."

Was he fooling Mrs. Belziel? He could not kid himself about his dissatisfaction with life. Whitman remembered the key question put to him by a television interviewer. The man was making a film on California life. Whitman cooperated because there was no such thing as bad publicity. They began by tracing his background. Born in Munich, he had been brought to America by his parents who were far-sighted enough to realize that Hitler's joke was going to be on them. Growing up comfortably in New York, he had a happy childhood except for the embarrassment of living with parents whose accent was not American.

Medicine as a career seemed to be a foregone conclusion. Whitman went along because his way was being paid and he could see the logic of becoming rich. But at college his most satisfying time was spent on stage with the dramatic group. He was good—better than most of the others who said they were going on to a career in the theater.

A drama coach told him once, after he had come off following a very good rehearsal, "You've got something, Mark. When you're on stage, nobody looks at anybody else."

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He was not surprised to hear it. "I love it up there," he said. "I feel in control."

By this time he was no longer Morris Weissman, he was Mark Whitman. He chose the surname of a poet whose work he admired. Looking at Brenda Belziel's dog, Whitman recalled a fragment from one of the poems.

I think I could turn and live with animals . . .
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins . . .

Brenda had been watching him closely. "Forgive me for saying so," she said, "but I think you hate your work."

He found himself telling her the truth. "I didn't hate it till about a year ago. Not consciously. A man making a film about plastic surgeons asked me a question. He said, 'With your obvious intelligence, do you feel you're doing enough with your life, devoting your time to giving rich women smaller noses and bigger breasts?'"

"What was your answer?"

"Something glib at the time. But subsequently I watched the film on television. The camera was on my face as he asked the question and I saw my eyes shift before I replied. It was a queer feeling. What I saw in my own eyes is what I have been experiencing ever since." Whitman drank again. "Eight weeks later I left home."

As he talked on, the woman seemed to accept with equanimity what to Whitman was a shattering story of a man falling apart in his early fifties. A wife who didn't care whether he stayed or ran away. A daughter 22 years old, absent for almost a year in India—irony of ironies, she was untraceable because she had changed her name. And here he was, attempting at this late date to take up an acting career in England.

"Sounds to me like a smashing idea," she said.

"Coals to Newcastle," Whitman said sheepishly. "I've learned there are seven thousand unemployed actors in London alone."

"But you have an American voice. That should be useful."

"No shortage of Yanks in the London theater. I was told to try the provinces. Look for work in some rep company. That's why I'm in Brighton."

"Any job so far?"

"I've been to see various groups perform but I haven't applied for an audition. They're all so good, I've lost my nerve."

She looked at her watch. "I don't think our conversation is finished, do you?"

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"It's been fun, Brenda."

"Two things. Will you come up to my house for a drink this evening? Say around eight o'clock? I'd bring you with me now but there are some dreary people I must get rid of."

"Yes, okay. I'd like to." He scribbled the address she gave him on a scrap of paper.

"The other thing is The Lion." She was on her feet now, organizing the dog for the door.

"You said his name is Giant."

"I mean the theater pub around the corner. They do a lunchtime performance most days. Have you been in?"

"Been meaning to."

"Do go in. No disrespect, but they aren't as professional as some of the others who have London connections. It might be the best place for you to break in."

"I hear you," Whitman said. "I'll finish my drink and give it a go."

There was a hinged wooden sign on the pavement outside The Lion advertising a performance of some comedy he had never heard of. Whitman went in and could tell by the appearance of the young people drinking that he was too late to see the play. They had to be the cast: girls with large eyes and mouths; young bearded men with their hair combed forward. Every phrase of their small talk carried in the sparsely populated saloon bar.

Whitman sought out the dusty bottle of Jim Beam lost behind two magnums of sherry. Waiting for his drink, he decided not to request an audition today. No harm waiting until he could speak without slurring his words.

He caught sight of himself in a mirror behind the bar and raised his glass to give that lonely image something to do. Two months of restaurant eating had given him some extra pounds. His face was firm, the skin retaining some of its California tan. "This is all there is for you," Whitman said to himself. "You've had a fling and it's over. No tragic scenes. You're going back to the soft life of changing faces and putting money in the bank."

One of the bearded youths came to the bar. He ordered a pint and a dry sherry. Whitman surprised himself by saying, "I meant to see your performance but I missed it. Maybe tomorrow."

"We could have used you," the boy said. "We aren't exactly playing to standing room."

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"Let me pay for these," Whitman insisted. When he had pocketed his change and looked around, he saw the lad at a table near the door, sitting down beside a young girl with astonishing silver hair. Sunlight through a window created a dazzling aura around her head. There was an empty chair at the table. The boy pointed to it and Whitman responded by moving across the floor, stepping carefully. He was as nervous as if this was the audition.

"Amanda Royston, and I'm Jeremy Lake."

"Mark Whitman. Hello. I was telling Jeremy I'm sorry I missed the play. I'll try to come back and see it tomorrow."

"That would be nice. Thanks for the drink."

"Are you connected with the theater yourself, Mr. Whitman?"

"Call me Mark. I'm old enough to be your father but I'd rather not be reminded." They laughed on cue and he felt encouraged. "Yes, I've done some acting. Not as much as I would have liked."

Jeremy turned round in his chair. "Hey, Norrie," he called to a bald-headed man with a baby face. "Listen to this." He turned back to Whitman and gave him an encouraging nod.

Whitman had lost all his earlier reticence. "Am I on?" he asked. Again the group laughed; he saw appreciative faces all around him. These were his kind of people. Good old Brenda—he was easing in because of her advice. "Had I but known," he said, "I would have rehearsed my soliloquy."

"What do you think?" Jeremy asked.

"You may be right," said the man called Norrie. "Let's talk."

There was a note of conspiracy in the air and Whitman found it exciting. Jeremy excused himself and went to an empty table in a corner where Norrie joined him. They began talking, enjoying their roles as men behind the scenes. Whitman looked at Amanda. She had spent a lot of money making the silver hair look roughly cut and unkempt. Her lipstick was pale. Most of the emphasis was on the eyes—hazel eyes outlined heavily in black, shaded with a sort of greenish-gold paste. Her face, and the sensuous way she held her mouth, belonged on the glossy cover of a pop record album.

Whitman found her easy to talk to. She laughed at the right places, and when their eyes met he experienced a feeling from over 30 years ago when all his sensations were sharp and new.

The landlord rang a bell. According to the English rule, they were closing the pub for the hiatus between three o'clock and five thirty. Jeremy and Norrie still had their heads together. "What's happening with them?" Whitman asked.

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She sized him up. "I think they want you for a part. I overheard Norrie a minute ago. He said something about 'Death of a Salesman'."

The character of Willie Loman in the great Arthur Miller drama had always appealed to Whitman. He had never attempted it—in his acting days he was too young. Now he had the years and the experience. "Is Norrie your director?" he asked, hardly able to believe his luck.

"Yes. Norrie Mikeljohn." She set her glass aside half full. "I'd like it if you and I could go some place now."

"You'd be crazy to become involved with me."

"Why?"

"Because I'm fifty-two years old. You can't be more than twenty. And you've got young Jeremy standing by. Never mind that I obviously like you. Don't be confused by that."

"What if I like you?"

She went to get her coat. Whitman waited at the door where Mikeljohn came to him and said, "Hold on, please. We don't want to lose you."

His voice had a scolding, spinsterish sound and his eyes, in that baby face, were narrow and reflected pain and anger.

"I plan to be around."

"Good. I may have a part for you. It's something I think you'll be just right for."

Whitman had the faintest feeling of being played with. "I'll try anything once," he said. "Nasty things I do repeatedly."

"Our man to the life," Mikeljohn said, smiling in a sophisticated way as he shook Whitman's hand. His grip was bone-dry and astonishingly strong.

Over the director's shoulder Whitman could see Amanda listening to Jeremy as he helped her into her coat. The garment was imitation leopard, hip-length.

Outside and walking, he found himself reluctant to bring Amanda to his room. It was upstairs over a restaurant, a seedy converted place called Margaret's. On a wet day in March, after he got off the London train, he had lunched there, tucking in at an oilcloth-covered table by an open fire. He was the only customer. A toothless old woman came out of the kitchen and bent his ear with stories as forgettable and soothing as the Musak in his L.A. surgery. Instead of snubbing her, he found himself encouraging her to go on.

He paid his bill at a table near a flight of stairs in the front hall.

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A sign in a frame on the faded wallpaper advertised bed and breakfast. Next thing Whitman knew, he was registered. Almost a month later he was still living there.

The pebbles that covered Brighton beach, worn smooth by the tides, made walking a tiring effort. Amanda soldiered on in her high heels, holding Whitman's arm formally so that he began to feel they were guests at some comic wedding. He was not sorry when she released him and went to sit on a wooden upright at the end of a breakwater. Whitman was always nervous this close to the ocean; he was never sure whether the tide was advancing or retreating. He took a deep breath. "No smog in *that* air," he said.

She laughed, took him by the lapels of his conservative topcoat, and drew him close, shaking him gently. "Health freak," she said, and kissed him. In the cold sea air her face was like a heater.

"I guess I'd better get you inside before we freeze."

"I thought you'd never ask."

Whitman's room, small, untidy, with its ancient bed and gloomy oak furniture, seemed cosy with two people in it. He snapped on the electric fire while she hung their coats on the back of the door.

"I've only got bourbon," he said.

"I don't want a drink." She arranged herself on the bed with a pillow behind her back. She had taken off her shoes to reveal large feet in nylon.

Whitman tried to understand why he was so ill at ease with this girl. The action in London had been positive, and from his point of view, a great success. But of course—those girls were strangers brought back to a hotel room for one reason only. This was Amanda Royston, a member of the group he hoped to join.

"My child," he said, feeling relief now that he knew how to play the scene, "I am not the last of the red-hot lovers. I hope I haven't misled you." He drew over a chair, sat beside the bed, and took her hand.

"I know that. What do you think *I* am? I'm here because I like your company." She pinged a fingernail against the glass he was holding. "Drink your medicine and tell me things about yourself."

Pale light through the window identified a different time of day. Whitman was lying on the bed now, Amanda seated in the chair, turning the pages of a paperback too quickly to be reading it. He must have fallen asleep. He remembered her shifting over and allowing him half of the pillow. They had kissed a few times, retaining

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a mood of humor that absolved him from going further. Then the whisky must have taken over.

"What time is it?" he said, rising onto an elbow.

"Just after eight."

"We have to get going. Due up the hill." The idea that he would bring Amanda with him to Brenda Belziel's was spontaneous. The invitation had been for him alone, but why not take this pretty girl?

Amanda was happy to tag along. She deciphered the address from Whitman's scrawl and said they could walk there. He washed, changed into a white shirt, and put on a dark jacket and striped tie. "Mister bank manager," Amanda said.

"Don't shoot the bank manager. He is doing his best."

"To rip off the public. Have you checked interest rates lately?"

He could have explained that high interest was keeping his investments ahead of soaring inflation but he sensed it would be the wrong thing to say to Amanda. He thought she resembled his daughter, who despised the system so much she had gone to live among the poorest people on earth. Or was it her father she despised? Whenever this suspicion arose in Whitman's mind he tried not to give it thinking room.

Up the hill they strode, arm in arm again; it could have been their honeymoon. The house was a brick-and-frame mansion overlooking the promenade and the sea. The heating bill alone would be astronomical, let alone the selling price.

Brenda seemed to inhabit the place without servants. She opened the door herself—a mahogany door with a hemispherical fanlight of stained glass. When they were seated in front of an open fire, Whitman saw that bringing Amanda had been a mistake. The women represented that English phenomenon, different classes. They could never be more than polite to each other.

Furthermore, as he watched Brenda pour the wine, he noticed she had to get out another glass. The occasion had been intended, obviously, as a tête-à-tête. Her nose was probably so far out of joint that it would take all Dr. Mark Whitman's professional skill to reset it. Never mind, they would have a drink and push off. Big Brenda, the Black Widow of Brighton, was only a chance acquaintance anyway. She had put him in touch with the drama group and thanks very much, but he owed her no eternal gratitude.

Accepting a glass of wine, Whitman became aware of music playing faintly in the background. It was the infectious, frenetic rhythm of The Quintet of The Hot Club of France playing "Sweet Georgia

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Brown." "Great stuff," he said. "I haven't heard Django in a long time."

"I particularly like Grapelly's violin," Brenda said. "My late husband knew him. Whenever the group was in this country, he stayed with us."

Whitman was beginning to see Brenda in a different light. "I owe you something for sending me to The Lion." He went on to explain how he had met Amanda and the others, ending with the possibility that he might be given a part. "So you may be responsible for keeping me here in England, Mrs. Belziel."

"If that's the case, I'm pleased," she said.

Amanda became silent while the older people talked. Every now and then she shook her silver hair as if this was the only way she could clear her vision. When Whitman looked at her, she smiled and pretended to drink. Eventually she asked where the loo was and excused herself.

A brief silence followed the girl's departure from the room. Then Brenda said with what Whitman could now identify as characteristic bluntness, "That one is a bad apple, Mark. Be careful."

"She's a kid. Anyway, I'm not involved."

"Don't be. I know her. Well, I know *of* her—she's notorious around here. She's been picked up more than once for shoplifting. Her driving license was suspended not long ago—that was for leaving the scene of an accident. Her family managed to get her off, but now they've washed their hands. She lives with one of the boys in the drama group."

"Jeremy Lake. How do you know all this?"

"I move around the center of town quite a lot. Especially since I'm alone. I decided after my husband died not to become the ghost of this castle. I talk to people. I'm a gossip."

"Thanks for the advice. I'm only with her because she latched onto me this afternoon when I was talking to the director. Norrie Mikeljohn. From now on I'll only see her at rehearsals."

She touched his arm. "I think we've started a new life for you here, ex-Doctor Whitman."

When Amanda did not return, Brenda went to look for her. "You never know with these kids. She may have overdosed and be lying on the floor."

It was sad but true, Whitman thought as he sat by himself. There was something clinical and sinister about the dope-takers beyond their furtive behavior forced on them by the law. Needles and smoke

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were not nice. Drinking was as natural as breathing, part of the life process. To ingest a moderate amount of alcohol this way, in company, that was how we were meant to get high. Not by snorting a pinch of powder up your nose. He thought that was a sad, perverse way to behave.

Brenda came back in a hurry. She spoke quickly, keeping her voice low. "Amanda was on the phone and I heard what she was saying. Something is going on. I don't know what it is but she told somebody you'll do perfectly."

"Did she say that?"

"She said, 'We can send him to see her tomorrow.' "

"To see who?"

"I didn't hear any more."

Amanda came into the room in a cloud of fresh scent. She did not sit down. "I'm tired now, Mark. If you want to stay, I can get back by myself."

"I'll come with you."

"That's a good idea, if you're auditioning in the morning."

"Am I?"

"That was my impression. Jeremy was saying they'd like to see you at the pub at nine o'clock."

Whitman arrived at The Lion at nine feeling hung over and suspicious. His grim mood did not seem to bother anybody. Mikeljohn gave him a copy of the play and asked him to read a few key speeches. When he had done so, the director said, "Not bad, Mark. When we start rehearsing I'd like more disenchantment. Amanda, where's that coffee?"

Before he handed back the playbook, Whitman noticed it was out of the public library and nobody else in the place had a copy. What kind of fool did they take him for?

They sat at the back of the room around a couple of tables, drinking coffee from plastic cups. There were donuts but not enough to go around. "What's your opinion then, Mr. Whitman?" Mikeljohn asked. "Do you think you'd like to join us?"

"That's whut ah'm here fur," Whitman drawled like a television hillbilly.

Through the laughter Mikeljohn intoned, "Mr. Treasurer, collect one new membership."

"Two pounds, please," Jeremy said apologetically.

Whitman paid with a fiver and there was a lot of commotion over

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putting together the change. Then Amanda got up from the table. "I'm off," she said. "Well done, Mark."

"You can't leave," Mikeljohn protested. "What about Auntie Jane?"

"I'm sorry, somebody else will have to go. I'm busy for the rest of the day." She thudded out of the room on white training shoes.

The director addressed Jeremy. "Can you go up and see her?"

"You know better than that. I'm too young—she thinks I'm her long-lost Robbie."

"I'd go myself except I have to see the arts council about the grant. Without that, we fold."

"What's the problem?" Whitman asked. "Can I help?"

"You might at that. We have a difficult and darling patron, dear old Jane Reedie—Auntie Jane she's known as, when we aren't calling her rude names." Mikeljohn glanced at Jeremy. "What say you? Should we risk sending Whitman into the pit on his first day?"

"Why not? He's a member now, let him have his baptism."

"Right. You're on, then, Marko."

Whitman felt pleased to be called Marko. Mikeljohn was clearly a manipulator, but there was magnetism in those deadly eyes.

It seemed that Jane Reedie had been a member of the group for decades. Now she was senile and lived alone in an apartment above a shop in The Lanes, surrounded by her treasures. She seldom took part in theatrical activities now, sometimes not even making it to the annual general meeting. But still she paid her dues and was good for the odd touch when the group was hard up.

Now she had agreed to lend them some of her costume jewelry for use as props in a Victorian melodrama they would be staging soon. But, being Auntie Jane, she could not be counted on to bring this stuff around. Somebody would have to collect it. Whitman would have to go.

"I don't see the problem," he said.

"You will when you get there," the director said. "Auntie Jane has an *idée fixe*. She believes her nephew Robbie is still alive. Robbie was attached as liaison officer to a U.S. Army unit that went ashore on D-Day at Omaha Beach. He was killed—his grave is in some corner of a Normandy field that is forever Brighton. But the curious brain of Auntie Jane rejects this. She believes her Robbie is walking the earth and about to appear at any moment."

Whitman began to feel a mixture of revulsion and anger, as if he had just stepped in something nasty.

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"Jeremy can't approach her," Mikeljohn went on. "She gives him tea and asks him questions about the family. But you, Marko my dear, with your American face and voice, will be immune."

"She may think he's the C.O. of Robbie's unit," Jeremy suggested.

"It's possible. If she does, tell her the story of Robbie's heroic demise. Then perhaps we can get on with producing plays. No, seriously, just hand her this note if you will." Mikeljohn passed over a sealed envelope. "It restates our request for the costume jewelry. Then accept the stuff with our thanks and come away."

Following verbal directions, Whitman walked the short distance to the address in The Lane, a complex of narrow streets near the seafront converted now to a district of shops selling mostly antiques and souvenirs. He rang a bell, heard a buzzer, opened the door, and climbed a flight of stairs. The door at the top was already ajar, part of a worried face visible behind the aperture.

For a few moments they were silent. Whitman had the envelope in his hand and the eyes behind the door watched it as if the envelope would speak when it was ready. Finally he said, "Miss Reedie?"

"Are you from them?"

"Yes. I'm to give you this and I believe you have something for me."

"You'd better come inside."

He went in and she closed the door. All Whitman could tell about the apartment was that it was dark brown and smelled of bacon. As he stood there, a cat performed tight figure eights between and around his ankles.

Jane Reedie was short and made shorter by her stooping posture. Whitman could imagine her bowing to perpetual applause. She led him into a sitting room, her eyes close to the head of the knobby cane that supported her. Here she did a three-point turn and peered up at him through auburn bangs. Her hair was neat and attractive—surely a wig.

"Is he all right?" she asked.

"Ma'am?" Whitman handed her the envelope.

"Robbie. I'm worried about him. You don't understand how I feel . . ."

There was never the faintest possibility that Whitman would do as Jeremy suggested and inflict on this woman the truth of her nephew's death 35 years ago. "I understand exactly how you feel. I can promise you Robbie is just fine."

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"Can I believe that?"

"Of course."

Her eyes softened as she looked closely at Whitman. "You're very kind," she said. "I can see you are a gentleman."

"Thank you." He was afraid he was about to be offered hospitality. "I think you'd better read that," he said.

As she opened the envelope and began reading the typewritten page inside, Whitman had time to study her face. The parchment skin, heavily wrinkled, showed years of neglect. But it was never too late. He could do a great deal to get rid of many of the signs of age. She could change to a fuller wig and hide the scars at the ears. If something could be done about her posture, she might go around as someone in her sixties instead of as the perambulating mummy she had chosen to become.

"All right," Auntie Jane said. Her hand was trembling, the page crumpled in her grasp. "All right!" She slammed the letter down on a table with surprising force. "Wait here."

She left the room. Whitman stood beside the table with the letter in reach. As he picked it up and read it, he could hear drawers opening and closing in another room. "Miss Reedie," the upper-case typescript read, "We have Robbie. He is safe now. But he will be killed unless you obey instructions. Do *not* call the police. If you do, Robbie will be shot. Give your emerald necklace, your diamond brooch, your diamond pendant, and all the rings to the bearer of this message. Do nothing else. When we have the jewels, we will release Robbie and all will be as before."

There was no signature. Whitman put down the letter as the old woman came back into the room. She was carrying a plastic bag with the name of a greengrocer printed on it. Whitman took the bag from her; inside it he could see a number of velvet-covered boxes.

"It's all there," she said. She sounded alert, completely in touch with the situation. The only indication of her madness was the fact that she was ransoming a dead man. "You haven't lied to me have you?" she pleaded. "Will Robbie be all right now? I don't mind losing my things as long as I can keep him."

"I promise you," Whitman said, "you and Robbie have a lot of happy years ahead of you." As he prepared to leave, he picked up the letter. "I'm taking this with me," he said.

Instead of going back to The Lion, he walked to Brenda Belziel's house overlooking the sea. Approaching, he heard his name called.

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"Mark! Hi!" He looked up and saw Brenda on an upstairs porch. She was at a table in the shade of an awning. He could see the gleam of a coffee maker. Giant's head loomed above the railing.

As he climbed the steps to the house, Whitman experienced a feeling unique in his entire life. Munich, New York, Los Angeles—this was the first time he had felt that he was coming home. It was so simple, there was nothing to it, and yet this must be what everybody else worked for and what all the songs and poetry were about. A relaxing of the muscles, a lifting of the heart, walking into a place where somebody was waiting and you had things you were anxious to tell her . . .

Brenda opened the door to him, started to speak, then hesitated, troubled by the tears in his eyes. "Are you all right?"

"Better than you know," he said. As he came in, he gave her a one-arm squeeze around the waist, partially lifting her off the floor.

She laughed. "I don't exactly mind that," she said.

"I smell coffee."

"There's lots. I was hoping you'd show up." They held hands going up the stairs. "What happened at the audition?"

"Audition for idiot of the year. But thanks to you I was on the alert. Wait till I tell you what's been going on."

Drinking strong black coffee and eating a croissant with butter and jam, Whitman told Brenda about Mikeljohn's phony assignment involving his visit to Miss Reedie's place, his discovery of the ransom note. "I have the stuff here in this bag," he concluded. "It must be worth a bundle." They spent a few minutes examining the diamonds and emeralds, obviously genuine, clearly worth many thousands.

"One thing I'm not sure of," Whitman said. "Did Robbie really die in the war or is that part of Mikeljohn's lie?"

"That part is true," Brenda said. "Everybody around here knows of Jane Reedie and her obsession."

"Then our friends are not kidnapers. There is no Robbie to be kidnaped."

"No, but they're guilty of extortion."

"So what's our next move?"

"The police. You did well to keep the note. I'll call them, they'll be here in five minutes. We give them the note and the jewels, you tell the story exactly as it happened, then that crew will get what they deserve."

Whitman considered this. "All right," he said at last. "But give me one hour before you call."

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"Why?"

"I want to talk to somebody first."

"It's the blonde. You want to give Amanda Royston a chance to get off the hook."

"I want to hear her side of it. I can't believe she would intentionally—"

"She's hoodwinked you the way she does every other man, including two magistrates." Brenda pushed her cup and saucer away with the flat of her hand. "She's probably the ringleader, Mark. I assure you, she's a nasty piece of work."

"Can you allow me one hour? Where's the harm?"

"There's none, I suppose," Brenda said quietly, "if it shows you how wrong you can be about some people."

At The Lion the pub was open for business. The barman told Whitman the performance had been canceled for that day. The players were upstairs in Mikeljohn's flat. Whitman had a drink to settle him and give him time to think. His decision to bring along the jewelry was correct, he was sure of that. The police would have to find the stuff in Mikeljohn's possession or he would simply deny everything. Leaving the ransom note with Brenda was right, too. She would have something to show the police after she called them in an hour.

As for Amanda, he would have to get her alone and hear what she had to say. Brenda could be right, the girl might be as wicked as sin. But that walk on the beach—granted, he was drunk—had contained something sweet and decent. If she had any good in her, he might be able to appeal to that instinct, to turn the girl around.

Whitman finished his drink, accepted directions from the barman, went through a devious succession of doors, and finally climbed two flights of steps through a grotty stairwell that smelled of beer and gas fires. In response to his knock Jeremy Lake opened the door. His eyes first met and searched Whitman's, then fell to the plastic bag. "You got the stuff? Good man!"

Whitman let himself be conducted inside. The flat was more of a loft, one large room with a low ceiling, windows on two sides, a mattress on the floor, ill-assorted furniture, a couple of closed doors. They were all there, Norrie, Amanda—and a stranger, a heavy-set man in a tight suit who occupied a chair against a wall, away from the others. "Home is the hero," Jeremy announced. "He has met Auntie Jane and she is ours!"

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Whitman allowed the bag to be taken away and given to Mikeljohn who took out one of the velvet boxes, opened it, and withdrew a diamond pendant. "Here's a pretty thing," said the director in the whistling voice of a Punch-and-Judy man.

The stranger got up and came across the room to stand at Mikeljohn's shoulder. His blond hair grew low on his forehead and had been combed with a lot of water. The brutish face was of the type seen by Whitman in textbooks posing the theory that by the use of cosmetic surgery such men could be diverted from a life of crime. This one had never had the benefit. He kept his right hand in his jacket pocket.

Amanda snatched the pendant and dropped it round her neck. "Let me wear it, Norrie. Just for one day."

Mikeljohn made no attempt to retrieve the jewel but he said, "You *know* what this stuff is for, my dear. And it is *not* for embellishing your grotesque chest."

Whitman was wondering how to get Amanda aside for the necessary conversation. He was beginning to wonder if it mattered. The stranger was asking who would be responsible for selling the stuff. Mikeljohn suggested they divide the articles now. "Our account with your organization is how much—four thousand? Surely we can agree on what will cover that. You want to continue selling to us and we need your services."

"Best cocaine on the south coast," Jeremy said, laying a comradely hand on the stranger's shoulder, removing it when the man looked at him.

It was then that somebody knocked on the door and a voice said, "Police officers." Brenda had made it a very short hour.

Mikeljohn glanced at Whitman, saw something in his eyes. "You crafty swine," he said softly. "You're a plant." He snatched the pendant from Amanda, dropped it in the bag, and hid the bag under his seat cushion. As he went to the door he said, "Leave the talking to me."

There were two uniformed men in the hall, neither of them very large, neither armed. Good old British cops, Whitman thought. They're going to walk in here and sort everything out with a few minutes of polite conversation. As they entered the loft, he caught a glimpse of Brenda Belziel hanging back at the top of the stairs. Their eyes met for a moment; she was frightened.

"What's the problem, gentlemen?" Mikeljohn asked. "Are we rehearsing too loud?"

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"We've had a report that you may have some property here that belongs to—"

"It's under the seat cushion," Whitman put in, anxious to be finished. "I took it from Miss Reedie and brought it here. I believe Mrs. Belziel has shown you the ransom note."

"You *are* a plant," Mikeljohn said. "Thanks very much, Amanda. Well done, Jeremy."

"Check the man in the suit," Whitman said. "The stuff was going to him."

One of the officers approached the stranger. Before he could reach him the man had a gun in his hand. Nobody spoke. The officer stopped in his tracks. The occupants of the room were frozen in a tableau.

Then Brenda Belziel moved forward into the doorway.

The stranger turned his head, the officer lunged forward and caught his gun hand. Whitman shouted her name and moved to push Brenda away. He heard an explosion and felt as if someone had punched him in the back. He knelt for a moment, then fell over on his side . . .

Whitman opened his eyes and decided he had only been unconscious for a minute or so. There was another policeman in the room now, a helmeted Bobby up from the street. The gunman was no longer in sight, Mikeljohn and friends were grouped at one side of the room. Brenda was kneeling beside him and so was the officer who had gone for the gun.

"You'll be all right," she said. "There's an ambulance on the way."

"Sorry about this, sir," the officer said. "I had to try for the gun. I recognized our friend—he's a very dangerous man. We've done well to get him in the bag."

Whitman thought of various things to say but speech seemed like too much trouble. Where was the bullet? Unless they got him to surgery very quickly, he realized he would be in bad shape.

Amanda was bending over him. "Why all this?" she asked. "We had a chance for something really good. Auntie Jane will never do anything with these things but keep them in a drawer."

Whitman looked into her eyes, past the paint, into depths as unfathomable as the sea. He forced himself to speak to her. It was important. "You're too good to be a thief," he whispered. "I see the good."

Her expression reminded him of his daughter's face when an

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emergency phone call brought him to the high school one day years ago. She had been taken to a room beside the principal's office after being caught in the basement with several boys. He had been shocked but able to recognize in those pretty eyes values quite different from his own. And why not? His daughter, this girl, they were individuals. Why should he expect them to see the world the way he saw it?

"I'm sorry," Amanda said patiently, "but you're dead-wrong about me."

Brenda came to visit Whitman in the hospital. Never mind the National Health Service, he was in a private room with a glorious view of the ocean. He could sit up now in bed, but he was due to stay for another week. After that he would need special care.

"Nice of you to open your doors to me," he said.

"In that big empty house? You must be joking. I only hope I can persuade you to stay on when you're all better."

He reached out to touch her cheek. "If they were all like you," he told her, "doctors like me would have to earn an honest living."

She watched him, her mind extending across broad areas of possibility. "This country needs surgeons," she said. "Quite a few have departed for where they can make a lot of money."

"But if I come and practice in England, what happens to Mark Whitman, frustrated actor?"

"You might be able to do both, on different levels."

His mind shifted, as it often did these days, to Mikeljohn, Jeremy, and Amanda. Brenda had reported they were out on bail and facing probably no more than suspended sentences. Their freely given testimony had opened up a wide avenue for the police into south-coast drug operations. The gunman was, of course, inside for the foreseeable future.

"Have you visited Jane Reedie?" he asked.

"I went up there yesterday. She wants to see you when you're out and about."

"I wouldn't mind seeing her again."

"I said we'd come round in a week or two."

Whitman decided to say something important. "For your information, my name is not Mark Whitman. It's Morris Weissman."

"Some of my best friends," she replied, "are plastic surgeons. I'm more concerned about wives in residence."

"This particular wife has wanted out for a long time."

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"Then welcome to England."

Later, when she was preparing to leave, he said, "I took the name of Whitman from the American poet, of course."

"Leaves of Grass?"

"That's the man. I used to read him all the time. I've been remembering a line of his that might interest you."

"I'm interested."

" 'A woman waits for me,' he quoted, *'she contains all, nothing is lacking.' "*

Brenda smiled at him before she went away and Whitman was left wondering how he could ever have judged her face plain.

DETECTIVERSE

CARBON COPY

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

An Irish pawnbroker named Brock
Collapsed and was treated for shock
When the diamond he took
In good faith from a crook
Was discovered to be a sham rock.

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a *NEW* short-short by

REG BRETNOR

John Vennah had murdered at least three young girls and two small boys. It was an open-and-shut case—but would his politically powerful family be able to get him off? . . .

WONDER CURE

by REG BRETNOR

When the police finally tracked John Vennah down and arrested him, half the city where his family was so well known reacted with shocked disbelief. The other half either felt a load of fear lift from them, especially if they were parents, or else grunted grimly and said they'd always thought the guy was weird. Dear little old ladies shook their heads, murmuring, "I simply can't believe it—he always seemed like such a *nice* young man. How terrible it must be for his poor mother!"

Men of his own age who'd been to school with him, and one or two of his old teachers, and certain former neighbors of the Vennahs recalled the things they'd caught—or almost caught—him doing years ago. But that had been before the Vennahs started sending him to boarding schools, getting him out of town in one way or another.

There was no doubt about one thing. John Vennah had murdered at least three young girls, after torturing and abusing them in a variety of ways; similarly, he had abused and murdered at least two small boys. The police had found their violated bodies buried near a mountain cabin of his father's, and he had, surprisingly, not even denied the crimes.

It was an open-and-shut case—or would have been if his father had not been the city's most important lawyer and his grandfather

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its most prestigious judge, with enormous political clout locally and on a state and national level.

Even that, of course, could not engineer his release on bail. But his maximum-security cell in the county jail was made more comfortable than it would otherwise have been, and there he granted interviews to avid media men eager to make him a celebrity, sitting in an easy chair completely self-possessed, his light-brown hair combed neatly back from his narrow forehead, his strange blue eyes peering through rather old-fashioned silver spectacles. He smiled at the newsmen with perfect, expensively straightened teeth; he answered their questions in a soft, almost coaxing voice; he kept turning the conversation from the crimes of which he was accused, discussing psychiatric theory, and why some people were superior and destined to survive and dominate, while other, lesser, weaker beings were born only to be victims.

The media men decided that he was either crazy or crazy like a fox, and they said as much. It made him angry, and in subsequent interviews he stated baldly that he was not insane, that it was society that was off the beam. The media ate it up.

In the meantime his grandfather and his father had hired the state's leading criminal lawyer to defend him, and the three of them had reviewed his situation very carefully. There was his history to consider—the history his family had done its best to cover up, sometimes buying the silence of the injured or of witnesses, sometimes using the sort of pressure only great political clout makes possible. It went back to his early boyhood, when they had discovered that he could not be given pets. What he had done to a cocker spaniel puppy had sent his mother running out wildly, pale and sick.

The episode was still vivid in their minds; and so were those that followed it, involving neighbors' animals at first, then finally an occasion when a truckdriver had found him in a normally deserted shed, starting to use a razor blade on a much smaller boy.

They had sent him to military schools, to three of them. Twice he had been badly beaten up and had run away; the third time he had been expelled, with the recommendation that he have psychotherapy. They had sent him to a long succession of psychiatrists and psychiatric hospitals, and all had given up, urging his parents to have him permanently institutionalized. Mrs. Vennah, weeping, would have none of that, arguing that there had *never* been insanity in her family or her husband's, and that certainly John would grow out of it as he matured.

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Strangely, in his last year in high school, and for the three years before he dropped out of college, he seemed to stabilize. He was quiet, withdrawn, very much a loner; his smile was too cold, too much like a sneer, to make others warm to him. He watched the tube a lot; he read oddly and sporadically; he went off on long solitary wanderings. But nothing happened—or at least nothing surfaced. "He isn't getting any place," his father said, "but he's straightened out, thank God!"

And then—

There had been disappearances. Rewards were being offered, mounting up. The city seethed with fear and anger. The press demanded action.

He had been careful, oh, so very careful. But the wrong person had seen the girl get in his car, had wondered, had copied down his license number. The police had come. They had gone out to the cabin with their dogs . . .

John Vennah's father and grandfather met with the out-of-town attorney. They went over the whole business point by point, his grandfather still towering, huge and bushy-browed, over his desk; his father lean, tight-lipped, taciturn; his counsel beautifully barbered and tailored for the courtroom.

"He's guilty as all hell!" his grandfather declared. He looked at them. "We're agreed on that?"

They nodded.

"And I suppose we also all agree that, the way the MacNaughton Rule is being interpreted these days here in this state and in the Federal courts, he won't have even a prayer pleading insanity?"

Again they nodded.

His grandfather's brows drew down. "Finally, because here we have no death penalty, he's certain to draw life without hope of parole." He glared at his son. "That, Willard, means he'll be a ready weapon for any enemy to use against us—the press will always help. That's something we can *not* afford."

"Then what the hell *can* we do?"

The old man sat back in his chair. "We can put him in cold storage," he said.

"What do you mean by that, Judge Vennah?"

"You've heard about cryonics, haven't you? People getting themselves into deep-freeze the moment they're dead, hoping they can be brought to life again when the world's found cures for what they died of? Well, it got a big boost in '88 when they proved that higher

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mammals can be frozen and revived, and even more when the Russians actually woke up that baby mammoth in Siberia."

"I think . . . I see," said Willard Vennah slowly. "That means we'd not be *killing* him."

"A good point," put in the counsel. "A *very* good point. Of course, it would have to be entirely voluntary."

A few hours later the three of them visited John Vennah in his cell. They laid it out for him, coldly and legalistically, examining each of his hopeless options, saying nothing of their own motives in the matter.

He was intelligent. He stared at them for a long time with his strange eyes. He told himself that, when those people in the future woke him up, they'd find a problem more difficult than they expected; he had defeated every headshrinker he had encountered. He smiled. Then he agreed.

Three weeks later his counsel presented the Vennah family's offer at a pre-trial hearing, arguing eloquently that they would defray all expenses—that the taxpayers would be spared the enormous costs of keeping this mentally ill, dangerous man in high-security confinement for forty or fifty or more years. And justice would ally with mercy; perhaps years from now a more advanced society with psychiatric wonder cures could bring him back to life, a useful citizen.

The judge agreed. Though there had been no enabling legislation, he declared, there quite clearly had been none prohibiting. The prosecution, who had good reason to keep Judge Vennah happy, agreed not to pursue the case. The media had a field day.

Ten days later, in the prison hospital, John Vennah was prepared for cryonic storage. He was given the necessary shots to slow down his life processes. He was wrapped in the winding sheet the treatment called for. He was taken away to the cold crypt where he was to lie for generations.

The awakening was much slower than he had expected, much slower and much more painful. For a long time he could see nothing; no sounds reached him. He was aware simply that he *was*.

Then there were vague lights and shadows, voices he could not locate, somewhere in the air. He felt a touch against his neck; he slept. When finally he awoke, it was to see four people standing over him, staring at him silently. They wore curiously cut clothing, yellow and white smocks like Nehru jackets. Their faces were utterly

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expressionless, extremely smooth, uniformly handsome.

He found that he could move his head. He looked around. The architecture was foreign to him—glowing walls decorated with vivid blots of color like Rohrshach tests, arched doorways, vaulted ceilings. The blots drew his gaze disturbingly. He looked again at the attendants. He was not curious about how the world had changed; his only thought was how he might contend with it. He tried to move his arms, and found that they had not removed his cerements.

"What—what year is this?" he asked.

They did not answer.

"How long have I been—asleep?"

One of the men spoke. His English was—the only word was *mutated*, its vowels and consonants hard to recognize. "You frozen, yes, now two hunder-thirry-and—yes, three years."

John Vennah peered at them. They did not look advanced. They did not even look intelligent. Suddenly the feeling welled within him that he would have no trouble in this society—that he could bring them plenty of it. He fought his laughter back.

"And I suppose you've found a cure?" he asked. "You know—for what they said was wrong with me?"

The man nodded heavily. "Yes," he replied. "We did not waken you until. We have the records; we know you. We have the cure, yes."

"That's great!" John Vennah told him. "And when're you going to take these mummy wrappings off?"

"They will be removed," the man promised him, "but after you have cured."

"Which will be when?"

"Soon, soon," the man said.

Minutes passed. John Vennah told himself that they must certainly work fast if they thought they could cure him before he even was unwrapped, and momentarily he was apprehensive. Was it possible? Could they have developed a technique that would do to him what lobotomy might have done in his own day? Then another look at their dull, impassive faces reassured him.

Fifteen more minutes passed. No word was said.

"Well?" he asked. "When do we start?"

"They come now," the spokesman told him.

There was sound. He looked around. A door had opened, and two more men had entered. One was tall and dark, hawk-nosed, professionally serene, dressed like the others but in white and pale blue;

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his companion wore a recognizable cassock, but black and saffron, with a sort of Roman collar; a string of votive beads hung from his wrist. They walked in total silence; their feet were bare.

Well, look at that! he thought, trying not to sneer. *Religious bunk!*

They came to him. "John Vennah?" the tall one said.

"Yes."

The man read from a paper—the record of his life before the freezing.

"So. All this is true? It is needful for us to know, for the cure. From you, yourself."

"It's true," John Vennah told him.

"Then we need not delay." The tall man nodded to the others. They took the four corners of the gurney. They started moving it toward the door. The man in the cassock, counting his beads, murmuring unintelligibly, followed behind them.

"How long is this going to take?" John Vennah asked.

"It takes a moment only."

"Well, I guess you're the doctor," John Vennah said.

The tall man stopped. He frowned. "You do not understand. True it is we have a cure for those like you. Yes, we have rediscovered it. The only cure. The cure that sets you free as you deserve, to where you belong."

He gestured. The door slid open.

"But I am not a doctor," the tall man told John Vennah humbly, pointing to the open courtyard where the scaffold stood. "I am the common hangman."

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

GARY ALEXANDER

An unusual story about an unusual detective . . . Meet David Clay of the Public Defender's Office (Juvenile Division) in the case of a tragic, brutal triple murder. Dave Clay had his orders: Go through the motions; go by the book, but don't make waves. The question was: could a conscientious public defender like Dave Clay follow such orders? . . .

A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

by GARY ALEXANDER

Children do have some rights in this country, but most of the legal ones protect only the child's physical well-being. One cannot, for example, mug one's child too often, too severely, too conspicuously. One cannot deprive one's child of adequate nourishment either. A parent accused of such crimes can be and is occasionally prosecuted in a court of law.

Unfortunately, tragically, parents who subject their child to more subtle forms of deprivation will seldom be held accountable. A child unloved has no legal redress. The sheriff will not intervene, nor will a social worker.

Only when this emotional barrenness erupts into violence does the System step in, as it did last Thursday night when Peter Callison, Junior was arrested for the murder of his mother, father, and sister.

It was unusual for the Public Defender's Office to be assigned the defense of a millionaire. Peter Callison, Junior, age fifteen, was heir to an estate worth millions, but Peter was a minor, so the funds were frozen. In effect, he was a pauper.

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On Monday morning Alvin Harris called me in and handed me the Callison file.

"Dave, as of now you are my Chief Deputy, Juvenile Division."

We are a small office in a medium-sized town: Harris and three underlings, including myself. Harris has been here for twenty years, in charge for the last twelve. He is hopelessly addicted to the security of civil service. We peons are typical of the Deputy Defenders whom Alvin has had over the years. We signed on at low pay, partly for the experience, partly to purge the idealism from our systems before moving on to the big bucks.

"How long have we had a Juvenile Division, Alvin?"

Harris glanced at his watch. "About five minutes. I'll call somebody to have it lettered on your door if you'd like."

I gave him a wide-eyed expression of mock gratitude. He was doing this to me for two reasons. He personally loathed any case that smacked of controversy or sensationalism. He also loathed any deputy who was overly questioning or argumentative toward him. I fit snugly in the latter category.

"Looks to me like a walk-through, Dave," he went on. "Open and shut. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for Friday. You'll argue that he shouldn't be tried as an adult. You'll lose, of course. Then you'll defend him in Superior Court, going with the incompetency angle. From what I know of the kid so far, you might be solid in that area."

I paged through the file. On top were photos of the three victims—Peter's mother, father, and sister. All had gunshot wounds in their heads and elsewhere. Seems that the neighbors heard the shots. At first they dismissed them as backfires, but there were too many, so they called the police. The officers found the bodies on the living-room floor within feet of one another. Peter Callison, Junior was located upstairs in his room, reading. He claimed he hadn't heard anything because his stereo was playing. There was no sign of forcible entry and every door and window in the house was locked. The boy was impassive, even when escorted downstairs past the victims. One officer had made reference to "ice water in his veins"; hyperbole wasn't normally found in official investigative reports.

"The weapon?" I asked.

"A Smith and Wesson .38. It's a huge house and it's landscaped like a jungle. They're still looking for it."

"Eight shots altogether, I see. Which means he reloaded before finishing the job."

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Harris raised his eyebrows. "Very good, Clay. Sweet kid, isn't he?"

"Why us?" I asked. "No close relatives?"

Harris shook his head. "No living grandparents. Mrs. Callison was an only child. Peter Senior has one brother five years older. His name is Paul and he lives in Portland. He's been checked out. He seems as poor as these people were flush. Evidently alienated from them too. Essentially, he told the detectives to go to hell."

I saw relief in Harris' eyes when I stood up with the file. "So you're asking me to go through the motions?"

Harris sighed. "I want the *appearance* of a good fight, Dave, even though it's hopeless. The media is going to be living with this one and I don't want any trouble. They haven't had anything so juicy since the kickbacks in the Assessor's Office. Go by the book and *please* don't make waves. I've already ordered a psychiatric evaluation, so half of your work's already done. Good luck."

I left, knowing who I was really defending: Alvin Harris, his reputation and august office.

I drove out to the Callison home, which was part of an exclusive suburban development. The area was new money, ostentatious money. Most of the houses were Twenty-first Century Gothics, ultra contemporary, with hardly a right angle in sight. The Callison residence was atop a hill, at the end of a cul-de-sac. It afforded a grand view of the city. Obviously, Peter Senior, as owner of Callison Air Freight, held his own in the neighborhood.

The place was still crawling with detectives, presumably in search of the weapon. The captain in charge gave me permission to go inside and look around, with a warning not to touch anything. They always say that, so I don't.

The foyer led directly to a huge, sunken living room. The large patches of bloodstain would never come out of that lush beige carpet. The images in those grisly photos projected themselves onto the spots. I shuddered, absolutely certain that when I left the Public Defender's Office, criminal law would not be my specialty.

I climbed a sweeping staircase, looking for Peter Junior's room. The first room past the landing was some sort of den, although it had more the appearance of a sports hall of fame—plaques, trophies, photographs, and framed certificates cluttered the shelving and walnut paneling.

The memorabilia provided a brief family history. Peter Senior had been a football star at Stanford during the early fifties. The pictures

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of him in a menacing lineman's stance depicted a large determined man. More recent photos proved him only slightly heavier and every bit as physically imposing. He had played no-handicap golf and was a terror on local squash courts.

Mollie, his wife, struck me as being classically Nordic, very athletic, yet lovely and feminine. All the hardware on the shelves confirmed that she had been a formidable tennis opponent.

Julie, the daughter, a junior at Radcliffe, was new money in pursuit of old, chasing it on horseback. A clipping described her as an Olympic hopeful in dressage.

Peter Junior, the surviving Callison, was notably absent in this shrine. I scanned everything twice, just to be sure. Nothing, not even a Little League certificate, the kind everyone receives whether they ever get off the bench or not.

His room was at the end of the hall. The detectives had it pretty well torn apart, so I couldn't determine if he was tidy or if he was an average teenager in that respect.

The walls were plastered with posters of aircraft, rockets, and robots that had starred in science-fiction movies. Model airplanes hung willy-nilly from the ceiling. The bedroom was decorated to the gills, but every single piece was inanimate—machines, past, present, and future. If the boy had had contact with another human being in his life, there was no evidence of that in his room.

I almost walked out before I noticed it. On the top of a bookcase, stuffed behind a plastic ICBM, was an old black-and-white photograph in an upright frame. A smiling man in flight gear sat on the wing of a Korean War vintage jet. At first glance I thought it was Peter's father, but I studied it more closely and saw that it wasn't. There was a definite resemblance but the man was smaller and his eyes weren't carnivorous.

I wasn't entirely a bad boy. The captain had ordered me to touch nothing. I touched only one item, the photo, which I stuffed inside my shirt.

I made arrangements to visit Peter Callison, Junior at the Juvenile Detention Center. After all, if I was to go through the motions, I should go through the motions.

Alvin Harris intercepted me on the way out of the office.

"The shrink saw him this morning," he said. "So did the prosecution's. We should have a written report before Friday's hearing. What are you going to talk to the kid about?"

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"The customary attorney-client stuff," I said with a shrug. "I'll play it by ear."

"Nothing fancy, okay? Just feel him out and explain the situation. I've had media people in and out all day. Just don't do anything that would embarrass me, okay?"

The best method of breaking loose from Alvin when he's in one of his uptight moods is to act smart. He'd rather walk away than deal with it.

"After I give him his hacksaw-layer cake we'll have a harmless little chat. That's all."

I strode out, enjoying the after-image of Harris' face. It was a haunted, totally exhausted expression, the kind you see on marathon runners at the end of the race.

As I headed for the Juvenile Detention Center I digested the few facts I had gleaned from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office earlier. We usually get along with them because our clients and their crimes are mostly minor league, so nobody's career is on the line. Of course the Callison case was different. Peter Senior was a leading citizen and our fair city had not been subjected to a triple murder for many a year.

The Chief Criminal Deputy assigned the case to himself. Scuttlebutt around town had him running for the top job this fall. He needed an adult trial, a conviction, and consecutive life sentences. He couldn't ask for the death penalty for a fifteen-year-old. An incompetency ruling would not enhance his reputation; an acquittal would destroy it.

He had placed himself in a box and the tension showed. He gave me ten minutes, lukewarm coffee, and Peter Junior's school records, including sketchy interviews with teachers and fellow students.

Peter attended a public high school, had an IQ of 153, and a C-minus grade average. He participated in no activities. He had no real friends. His teachers characterized him as quiet and obedient. His peers pegged him as weird. A loner.

Our Juvenile Detention Center was frayed around the edges and chronically understaffed, but they tried. I'd been there before on behalf of runaways who had got into mischief. Today, as then, the noise was random and continuous. It was not a happy place.

I was taken to the isolation wing, where the heavy felonies and drug overdoses were housed. The cells were small and padded. Most of the kids were kept at the other end in Army-style barracks.

I asked the counselor a stupid question. "Is Callison isolated for

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security reasons or has he been disruptive?"

The counselor smiled tolerantly. "Everyone here should behave so well, but he's not here for stealing hubcaps, you know."

A police officer sat outside Peter Junior's door. I wasn't sure if he was there to keep Callison in or reporters out. He let me in and locked the door.

Somehow I wasn't surprised by Peter's appearance. He had a pasty complexion, was short for his age, slender, and almost feminine. He was no chip off the old block.

"Dave Clay," I said. "From the Public Defender's Office. If it's all right with you, we'll be going into your hearing together."

He got up from his bunk, nodded politely, and offered a limp handshake. His eyes struck me immediately. They were merely optical instruments, with no emotional backlighting. He gestured for me to take a seat on the bunk, as if one businessman were inviting another into his office to discuss routine matters. Peter was fifteen going on fifty. I didn't need professional training to determine that the boy was a psychological cripple of some sort.

I explained the procedure to him, outlining the possibilities he might have to face.

Then I trotted out the clichés used in the movies to delineate attorney-client relationships, emphasizing confidentiality and the need for absolute frankness between us.

He replied with a patronizing smirk. I deserved it since I had patronized him, but I hate that response from anyone, let alone a fifteen-year-old.

"Did you do it or didn't you?" I asked bluntly.

Peter shrugged. "Maybe, but not that I recall. They say I did, so I could've blacked out or something."

"They haven't found the gun yet," I said. "Let's say you did do it and don't remember. Where might you hide something you don't want discovered? Do you have a special hiding place for things?"

"Dirty books and stuff like that?"

"Yeah."

"Nope. I don't think Mom ever cared enough to snoop."

"I doubt that very much," I said.

Another patronizing smirk. Again I was repaid in kind.

I tried the shock method. "Peter, I want you to realize that the death penalty is back on the books in this state. We have to help each other."

He nodded and said, "It's the electric chair, isn't it? I was curious

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about that. Do they do it with high voltage or is it the amps? I've experimented with electric motors on my model planes, but they're really too heavy for the power they put out and—"

I interrupted with a reference to the psychiatrists who had seen him, risking total loss of rapport. People are quite sensitive when their innermost feelings are probed. They don't want to admit that they're walking around with a head full of stripped gears. I told him that the ability to stand trial is a subjective thing and that he'd best plant both feet on the floor and level with me.

He was amused rather than offended. "Those doctors were nice guys. It was stimulating."

Stimulating!

"What did you talk about?"

"Mom, Dad, and Sis, mainly. They wanted to know how we got along."

"How did you?"

He patted an empty pocket on his coveralls. "Do you have a cigarette?"

"I don't smoke."

"Very sensible. Oh, we got along fine. My parents had obligations toward me. Food, clothing, shelter, education. You know. They took care of all that. My obligation was to behave, attend school regularly, and make a bed. We all did our jobs."

It was early June and Peter's cell was sweltering. My arms were moonscapes of goose pimples. I wished I'd brought a sweater.

"I was impressed with your den. A vigorous family."

Peter chuckled. "Oh, the Holy Room? I guess I didn't fill up much space in there."

I thought of Peter Senior, of his athletic prowess, of the business he had built. I doubted if he had had much truck with losers, with noncompetitive types. To have a weak son, a product of his seed, must have been intolerable.

"I imagine you and your father shared a common interest in aviation. His business. What I saw in your room."

The smirk tilted higher. "Are you kidding? Dad didn't fly. He didn't even like to get on an airliner. He knew how to make money and there's lots of money in air cargo, you know."

I took the photo I had lifted from his room and gave it to him. "I had to remove it from the frame. Even so, it's still considered contraband here, but I thought you would like to have it."

Peter flushed. I had rung an emotional bell, but most of the

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emotion stayed beneath the surface.

"I appreciate this, Mr. Clay."

"It's Dave. Anyone you know?"

"Sure, Uncle Paul."

"Your father's brother who lives in Portland?"

"Yeah. It's an old picture of him but my favorite. That's his F-86. Did you know he shot down four MiGs? Got two in one day. One more and he'd have been an Ace, but they strafed his runway. His unit was being scrambled and while he was running out to his ship, he caught some bullets in a leg, so he got shipped home."

"Sounds like a helluva guy. Did you see much of him?"

Peter didn't answer for nearly a minute. The temperature in the room dropped another ten degrees.

He said finally, "I'm getting kind of tired. Can we do this some other time?"

"Friday's closing in on us, Peter."

He shrugged once more. "You know where I'll be."

Psychiatric evaluations frequently coincide with the wishes of the side ordering them. You can expect to enter court knowing that the bad guys have an opinion one-hundred-and-eighty degrees out of phase with your own.

If you're defending, your client will be as lucid as a cantaloupe. If you're prosecuting, he'll be normal but antisocial to an extreme. Like Heinrich Himmler.

Occasionally the opposing doctors take umbrage at the remarks of the other. Old grievances may appear. The attorneys, bless their evil minds, exploit these differences. We sometimes reach the threshold of threats and counterthreats, of possible slander charges, of complaints filed with whatever professional societies the doctors are members of. In a dull, protracted murder trial where the evidence is inconclusive and the witnesses numerous, such fireworks are about all that keep any of us awake.

I had written off the hearing. It was a leadpipe cinch that Peter Junior was going to be remanded to Superior Court to stand trial as an adult. My only hope was testimony from our psychiatrist. I wasn't happy with the prospect of the kid whiling away the years with the Mad Hatter and March Hare, munching tranquilizers six times a day; but if he went to the state pen the old hands would scoop him up in five minutes.

I don't have to tell you why. He'd be Queen of the Hop.

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In his office Dr. Pelfrey, our guy, ruined my whole day. He said, "He's a textbook sociopath. Dissertations have been written with less material than he alone provides."

"I don't seem to have Webster with me."

"A psychopath and a sociopath are similar. They manifest their needs, their whims, with an utter lack of concern for any other creature on this planet. Say a sociopath is in a bar and runs out of money; though he would prefer to stay and drink more, he'll excuse himself, hurry out and stick up a gas station. If it happens that the attendant recognizes him and the sociopath knows he is recognized, he may put a bullet in the attendant's head. He's aware that what he's doing is wrong. There's no confusion, no departure from reality. He wants something, he gets it. So sorry about the flotsam left in his wake.

"The psychotic personality differs. He has a nodding acquaintance with reality, but when his mind is made up on something, Nellie bar the door. To use a technical term, he's a brick short of a load. He wanders between Earth and a parallel universe."

"Aside from what's in your report, what can you tell me about Peter? Did he do it?"

Dr. Pelfrey's hands flew up in mock surrender. "If he confessed, I can't say. We're in the doctor-patient realm there."

Alvin Harris, to his credit, instructed me not to waltz with Pelfrey. Our office did ten grand a year with him.

"Hippocrates won't roll over in his grave if you give me a teensy-weensy clue, Dr. Pelfrey," I said. "I have to go in there Friday like a Super Bowl coach with twenty-five of my best players out with knee injuries. Alvin got next year's budget last week. He says it's brutal. We'll have to shut down the office coffee pot. Among other cutbacks. We can be coy if you like. You know, is it larger than a breadbox and so forth. You pick the format. So long as the information emerges."

Dr. Pelfrey slammed his palms down on his polished rosewood. He took a deep breath and glared at me. "I can read between the lines. Get out your bamboo splints because it ain't no free lunch! Clay, hell, you should pay him my fee. I stumbled out of there and he knew more about me than I did about him. I haven't a glimmer!"

Alvin Harris cried out in imagined pain, then laid his head on his desk and buried it with his arms. By and by he sat up, saying, "You want to plead that little squirrel *not guilty?* Clay, the house

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was sealed, the alarm system was functioning!"

I'd picked up one of Peter's mannerisms. I shrugged and offered a tight smile. I sure as hell didn't have anything else going on this case. "Have they found the gun yet?" I asked.

"It'll turn up. The damn thing isn't biodegradable, you know. But that's the least of your problems. What you have to do is get over to what's-his-name, the Chief Criminal Deputy, and extend a formality. He's not gonna fry the kid. Even if he wanted to, his campaign manager wouldn't let him. If you want to be a hero, maybe you can get concurrent terms instead of consecutive. The kid will be up for parole before all his hair has fallen out. By then no one will care.

"Do *something*, for Pete's sake, and make it positive. That guy from Channel Three was over about an hour ago, the one who does those editorials on how the pollution from the chemical plant affects us. He was trailing this dame from the network who was mumbling about doing a documentary. Clay, get the kid in there Friday, tell him to behave himself, and maybe we can lighten the problem for him a tad."

Alvin wasn't in an ideal frame of mind for a debate, but I felt I had to present the facts, or the lack of them.

"No gun. No powder burns. No nothing. He was just there."

"Circumstantial evidence isn't bad in this one," Harris fired back. "They don't have to have a smoking pistol here."

"Whatever. I have my doubts. You know he'll be handed over Friday. You also know that if Pelfrey says he's competent, their guy will too. What you're saying is for me to make a deal with the P.A.'s office and trade a plea so Peter has to spend only fifty years in the can instead of a hundred."

"I'm telling you to be reasonable. If we had *anything* to go on, I'd say fight. But we don't."

"Yes, we do," I said. "The boy is, uh, strange, but I'm not entirely convinced he's a killer."

Alvin closed his eyes and moaned. I got out of his office before he opened them again.

Thursday was on me in what seemed like a hurry. I'd planned to see Peter in the afternoon and outline my strategy. I stopped over at the Chief Criminal Deputy's, hinting that I was in a flexible mood, then asking if the investigation had turned up the gun or any other information.

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He shook his head and served me another cup of lukewarm coffee. He began discussing concurrent sentences when I told him that he needed a new coffee pot and that I was going to let a jury decide this one. I'm not certain which assertion he thought was so hilarious because I left his office without further conversation.

I had some time to kill so I called the business editor of one of the newspapers to learn more about Callison Air Freight. Undoubtedly the police had covered this territory by now and if a skeleton had fallen out of a corporate closet, our office would have been notified, so my efforts were in the realm of idle curiosity.

The editor had done an article on Callison Air Freight a month ago when they won a contract that connected them to Malaysia and Singapore. Callison was financially healthy, he said, and growing like a weed.

I wondered if he knew who the other corporate officers were and who besides Peter Senior owned large blocks of Callison stock. He didn't, but he gave me a number to call at the capital.

The woman I talked to worked in the Secretary of State's office, in the department that processed corporation charters. She couldn't tell me much except the date of incorporation, the names of the officers, and the changes to the charter that had taken place over the years.

She may have told me a great deal more than she realized.

Peter and I small-talked for a while, then I told him what I wanted to do. He was agreeable, maddeningly so, as if we'd just decided where to have lunch.

I said, "I learned something interesting this morning. Did you know that Callison Air Freight was formerly Callison Brothers Air Cargo, that your father bought out your Uncle Paul in 1964?"

He nodded blankly. "Yeah. They were small back then. One beat-up old DC-3. Uncle Paul was the chief and only pilot. I told you before that Dad didn't fly."

"I'll bet your Dad bought him out cheap."

"Could be. I don't know."

"Paul was probably sorry he did after the company took off."

"I don't know."

"I hear Paul hasn't been doing very well lately."

Peter's eyes widened. "That's not his fault! His leg that got shot up in Korea, he needed an operation on it two years ago. He couldn't fly any more."

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"I didn't say it was his fault, Peter. Lucky, though, that he lives in a nearby town, isn't it? Having his family close enough to help him through the rough spots."

"Why don't you drop it, okay?" he snapped. "That guy who's going to try me and that other guy from your office were by yesterday to talk to me. All they asked about Uncle Paul was when I last saw him."

I squeezed my hands together and remained outwardly calm. "When did you last see Uncle Paul?"

"I don't know. Last fall, I think."

"That's odd for brothers who live only a few hours apart. But your father was a busy man. I suppose he mailed Paul a check now and then."

That cockeyed smirk returned. "Are you kidding? They hated each other's guts. I'll bet Dad cheated him when Uncle Paul sold out. That's what I think."

I took a deep breath. If there was such a thing as a right time to draw to an inside straight, this was it.

"Is that why Paul killed your father? Did he come over for money? Was there an argument? Did tempers flare? Maybe he really didn't mean to fire the gun. Maybe there was a struggle. Maybe your mother and sister got involved. Maybe one of them ran to the phone. In any event, they were witnesses. You were upstairs alone, as you usually were. In the heat of it Paul probably wasn't aware that you were in the house. Lucky for you, otherwise he may have—"

"He would not," Peter screamed. "He'd never have hurt *me*."

The boy was trembling. His eyes were moist.

"Then after Paul left," I went on, "you locked up and waited for the police. The gun hasn't been located because Paul took it with him. Everything so obviously points toward you that Paul wasn't even suspected."

I had brought a pack of cigarettes this time. I waited until he smoked one.

"Well, Peter?"

He lit another one and stared at the opposite wall.

"Do you know what my folks got me last Christmas? Football pads and a tennis racket. They wouldn't say anything. They'd just watch to see if I'd use the stuff. Then it would go into a closet with every other present they got me but really got for their own egos. Nobody ever yelled at me, Mr. Clay. Not that I can remember. Nobody ever hit me. They just disapproved of me.

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"When they finally gave up and accepted the fact that I was different and that I'd never change, they just left me alone. It was real hard for Dad to even talk to me. When he did, it was like he was talking to a stranger on the street."

I fought back tears, then a surge of nausea. "Uncle Paul. Did he pay attention to you?"

"The best he could. He wasn't welcome in the house, so we talked on the phone a lot. Those model airplanes you saw in my room, they were presents from him. He never sent me the easy kind either, that plastic junk. These were wood and tissue. Uncle Paul said I'd appreciate them more if I had to work to put them together."

"Did you really intend to take the blame for him?"

"I don't know. Uncle Paul probably won't let me anyway when he finds out I'm in trouble. I just figured I'd play along for a while."

"And subject yourself to all that goes with being an accused killer?"

He lit another cigarette. "Why not?" he said with a casual shrug. "All kinds of people are interested in me now. People listen when I say something. What's wrong with that?"

I walked out, happy that Peter would soon be free. But that didn't prevent me from almost losing my lunch in the parking lot.

There was no hearing. I related my story to Alvin, who passed it on to the Chief Criminal Deputy, who immediately called the Portland police.

When the coroner arrived at Paul Callison's fleabag room, his initial guess was that Paul had been dead for about twenty-four hours. The missing .38 was on the floor beside the pillow he'd fired it through. On the bed a Portland newspaper was opened to an article about Peter's upcoming hearing.

I surmised that Paul had picked suicide as the only way to handle his problem and Peter's too. He knew that he and his gun would be discovered sooner or later; when that happened, both he and his nephew would be free.

Peter stayed at the Juvenile Detention Center for several more weeks, while foster home arrangements were made. I visited him every few days and noticed that he had become a minor celebrity with his peers. He lived in the open wing now and seemed to enjoy the attention.

A family east of the mountains who volunteered to take him was approved. They had eight hundred acres of winter wheat and the

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consensus was that the fresh air, country living, and Middle American values would do the boy a world of good.

I doubted it. Peter had passed into adolescence emotionally stunted. As with anybody who had an untreated childhood-growth disorder, I felt it was much too late.

I drove Peter to the airport. When his flight was called, we shook hands. I gave him the stock pitch about regarding his new life as an adventure. He asked me if I planned to go into private practice soon.

"Why?"

That same smirk. "I'll probably need a good lawyer when my inheritance clears. Just because these people are farmers doesn't mean they won't try to get their grubby paws on it."

I didn't know how to reply, so I didn't. I waited until his plane broke ground, then entered the nearest lounge, and had a couple of stiff drinks.

Odds were I'd never see Peter Callison, Junior again. The probability that *someone* in the criminal justice system would at another time and place was, unfortunately, much better.

"Q"

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"Mary faced her facts, made her decisions, and felt better because she had given herself goals and deadlines" . . .

A HARMLESS VANITY

by THEDA O. HENLE

It was—until it ended—an ordinary domestic triangle: a husband, a wife, and another, younger woman. For the three participants, of course, it was not, by any stretch of their imaginations, ordinary, and for the wife it was shattering.

A kind, meddlesome friend told her that George had a mistress in La Mesa, and she wondered why she hadn't guessed without being told. He'd been careless enough, heaven knows, counting on her to be credulous and blind—or not giving a damn? She led a very full, happy life—even without children—and had never been one to anticipate trouble. Her love for him was unchanged, and she never questioned his for her, never looked for grief. But the danger signs were there—if she'd ever looked.

His love-making had become perfunctory and infrequent; she'd thought this was because he was adjusting to a new job, a substantial advance which involved a much more demanding schedule. He'd taken to coming home late several evenings a week. That, too, was accounted for by his new responsibilities. In fact, all the alterations in his behavior—his inattention, his growing irritation with her unprepossessing looks, haphazard housekeeping and sloppy work habits, his withdrawal when she made amorous advances—everything had been attributed to the new job and the absurd air of importance that apparently came with it. His "position" called for a grander background, he'd told her.

"I owe it to myself—and to the prestige of the firm. My home should look like $250,000—God knows it cost enough! And my wife should, too. You're not a grubby student any more. You're an established artist." He hadn't liked it when she laughed at him.

"A man is judged as much by appearances as by his superior qualifications," he said.

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Imagine George talking like that even a year ago! Mary had been sure he was going through a temporary phase, that his common sense and humor would surface, and he'd settle down and be himself again. Not for a moment had she suspected that the changes she saw in him could be permanent—or that his love for her was changing too.

It was this that made the sick pain so much harder to bear, her naive stupidity. She knew that nothing stays the same; she wasn't really stupid, but she had exempted her marriage and his love as glowing exceptions. Until death us do part. God, how could she have been so blind—and so complacent?

It took Mary Hitchman agonizing hours to absorb the shock—and the pain which, surprisingly, was so physical. It took interminable, lost days before she gained an upper hand over her self, and was ready to face the facts and decide what she would do about them. It was the hardest thing she had ever done, and the first hard thing she'd done alone. Even facing the fact that she had "a nice talent" but no genius had been shared.

Fact number one: George loved someone else—was probably making love to someone else right now, someone younger—someone who evidently did look like $250,000!

Fact number two: He would never divorce her because her family had money, and he liked being wealthy. This other woman, she was hardly more than a girl, Liz said, and didn't have a cent.

Fact number three: She would leave him if she had to. She wouldn't divorce him if California laws made her give him so much as half a dollar; but to live with him in a marriage of polite pretense was unthinkable. There would be no dragged-out, miserable status quo for her! Mr. George Hitchman, Esquire, wasn't going to have his cake in the suburbs and a wife with a grand background in San Diego if she had anything to say about it! She'd have to talk to him soon, make all this clear, but first she had to meet the woman.

She was a schoolteacher and her name was Carol James. George must have met her last winter when he gave a series of lectures at San Diego State. Mary thought she remembered his mentioning a young woman with admiration—a serious, promising midwesterner, he'd said, who was working evenings toward her Master's degree, and who had none of the far-out notions he deplored in other younger people. He certainly hadn't mentioned her lately! Mutual friends on the faculty at San Diego State knew about the affair, had seen George and his Carol James on the campus, in the park, and once

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at a motel in East San Diego. They liked the girl, Liz Ferguson told Mary, and they did not like what George was doing to her. He hadn't told her he was married—had, in fact, asked Liz and Dave Ferguson not to tell her.

"Let me handle this in my own way and in my own time," he'd said, but he had not thought to ask them not to tell his wife.

Mary faced her facts, made her decisions, and felt better because she had given herself goals and deadlines, and something to do. Inaction is the worst liniment for disaster. She'd meet Carol James, perhaps even talk to her; that would have to wait for the atmosphere and the reality of the moment. They might never get beyond trivialities—how could she know before she saw her? She only knew she must meet the woman George was loving. She must assess the magnitude of her loss, the strength of the competition, before she talked to George—or a lawyer.

She'd manage her confrontation casually, somehow, but before that she would spend some time and money in a beauty parlor and a boutique. Like so many other complacent wives, she had let herself go disgracefully. Now that the horse was loose, she'd do something about the barn door. A facial and a manicure. Surely there was someone who could scrub off the paint and charcoal! She'd have her hair cut short. She'd have a permanent. Better yet, she'd have it dyed! She should have done this years ago. Her long unwieldy hair only aggravated the headache she'd suffered almost without letup since Liz had told her.

Bouts of ugly, stormy weeping still caught her unawares, but at least she could cut all that hair off. George wouldn't even notice! It was a long time since he'd praised her hair, or anything else—*or anything else!* And no wonder, she thought, staring wildly into a mirror: she looked positively plain. She looked old, and she wasn't forty yet. She could still compete for a man's attention, and by God, she would! She'd give George the glamor-wife he wanted, and maybe—just maybe—it wouldn't be too late. She could do no more, she thought with sick fury, remembering how much he'd loved her once.

George would be away—in Sacramento not La Mesa—until Saturday afternoon. She had five days to patch herself up, meet the "other woman," and decide if her marriage, too, could be patched up. She'd know that as soon as she met Carol James. Liz Ferguson was delighted to act as middle woman—that was her favorite role. She was an ebullient extrovert who made friends easily and enjoyed

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being helpful. She liked being "in" on things, maneuvering, rearranging—always, of course, with the best of intentions. She and Carol taught summer classes during the week, Liz said. They would come to meet her at the cove on Saturday.

As long as the weather permitted, Mary swam at the La Jolla cove, sometimes during the week and always on Saturdays. Every summer-Saturday had found her there—and sitting in the same spot—since high school. Her friends knew this and would come, often on purpose, to join her over at the far left, where the high rocky cliff curves down around the edge of the beach to form a smaller cove within the larger one.

If this Saturday habit had started as an affectation, it had gradually become an essential part of her life. That small secluded niche in the Pacific was the only place where she felt completely at home and free within herself. (Sometimes she thought she should have been born with gills.) She had chosen her retreat well. It was a unique and beautiful place—a beach so sheltered by the cliffs on either side that you could swim there, not just fight the surf or ride the waves. She loved it because, while it was never the same, it never changed. It could be both frightening and reassuring—wild and dangerous when the tide was high and the winds blew, still and peaceful when the day was calm. Oddly enough, she had never wanted to paint the ocean, although it meant so much in her life. She only liked working with people—and animals.

Long before she was Mary Hitchman, Mary Burns had learned to swim in the cove—from one of the lifeguards—to ride the waves, and to dive far down into the clear water around the reef, where goldfish darted in the seaweed, and the world was silent. She would float for hours out beyond the rocks, letting the waves rock her gently or tumble her over into the salty spray. She had played there as a child—and daydreamed as a young girl; she'd learned to be afraid there, when the tides ran strong and she'd overestimated her own strength, and she'd learned to love George there, lying close to him on the sand, wrestling in the water—now, of course, "his work" took even his weekends. They had made love there one August night when the sand was still warm, and the beach completely deserted except for a scattering of stars in the sky and the sensuous rhythm of the waves . . . On Saturday, Liz would bring Carol James to this place of hers for a swim.

Waiting for Saturday, Mary fought against memory and fear at the beauty parlor and the small expensive shops in Del Mar and La

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Jolla. She'd never spent much money on herself; now she did so lavishly, enjoying the new experience in spite of her unhappiness. Thank heavens she still had a good figure! She became an instant blonde. She'd always envied blondes, and it made her look years younger. Her mirror, and the neighbors and friends she ran into, told her this. She had been pretty, but suddenly she was much more than that. The new hairdo and the clothes gave her a sparkle. She'd been too "sweet" before, but pain and a staunch determination to resolve her problems privately and decently gave her something happiness couldn't give—it gave her style. The boys in front of Safeway's whistled at her, and she walked past them with a new spring in her walk, and a new poise.

She reached the cove Saturday morning, ready, she believed, for whatever might happen. She wore an emerald-green bikini and a dark green, sinfully expensive jacket—she who had worn the same serviceable blue for years, and she noticed, with delight, unmistakable signs of interest as she picked her way among the heavily bronzed males lounging on the hot sand. Perhaps she'd make the same gratifying impression on George, flying home that afternoon from Sacramento!

Shortly after noon Liz, burdened down with bathing paraphernalia and an air of importance, and Carol James, looking like all the other girls Mary knew, came across the sand to the end of the beach where she sat, waiting. Their meeting was casual, and Liz Ferguson's introduction used first names only. The three of them lounged in the sun, digging their toes into the sand, watching unusually heavy waves batter the rocks out near the reef, and talking idly while Mary studied this stranger who had torn her life into jagged pieces, appropriating George without knowing he was secondhand goods. She had not known how much the thought of George making love to this—this child would hurt, but she managed to look relaxed and pleasant.

The girl looked like a teenager. Mary hadn't realized she'd look this young—like all the girls on all the campuses across the land. She was boyishly slim, light and graceful in a modest blue suit which she'd obviously chosen for swimming, not for show. Her hair was a well-brushed light brown—again like all the girls on the beach, long and straight and shining, framing an intelligent, happy face.

Mary could find nothing there that wasn't lovely and honest—and she had an artist's eye. If there was anything ugly or cheap there,

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she'd have seen it. She understood, helplessly, how George could love this radiant girl; how he could want, want desperately, her soft, untouched youth; but she didn't understand how he could lie to her, or seduce her with empty promises, as he must have done. His love for Carol James was imperfect, too, and Mary found an unexpected, new pain in this knowledge.

It was a hot day. After almost an hour of desultory conversation—mostly about the charms of southern California—Carol wanted to swim. It was high tide and the waves were strong, but she assured the other two that she was a good swimmer. Mary didn't want to get her new permanent wet yet, and Liz wanted to talk to Mary. The younger woman piled her hair on top of her head, secured it firmly with a large barrette, and ran into the water, swimming quickly toward the open ocean with strong strokes. Mary had no desire to talk to Liz—or to anyone else, but Liz was doing her a kindness, and Mary Burns Hitchman had always been a proper, polite woman. She lay back on her beach towel, closed her eyes against the hot midday sun, and mumbled answers to her friend's persistent questioning.

Of course it helped to look younger and handsomer; the new hairdo had done worlds for her morale. Not that her morale couldn't do with a few more boosts!

No, she didn't want Liz to leave them alone—the last thing she wanted was a private talk with the girl. She knew all she needed to know already, and no, she didn't plan on telling her who she was. She *couldn't.*

Carol James wasn't at all what she'd expected—so young and serious. Mary had imagined somebody more seductive, a little grasping, somebody she could hate and blame and fight. Not somebody she could hurt.

She'd have it out with George when she got home. Beyond that, she couldn't guess what would happen. Almost, she didn't care! This young lovely child deserved something better than a middle-aged man turning pompous with success. *That's* what she would tell George! . . . And she was able to laugh when Liz did.

Gradually the two women, absorbed by the sun and their immediate thoughts to the exclusion of the rest of the world, realized that something untoward was happening out by the reef—one of the periodic swimming accidents which occur even on the best-guarded beaches. Swimmers insist on swimming too near the rocks where the waves pound relentlessly. Poor swimmers put unwarranted faith

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in themselves and their fancy goggles and fins and frog suits, and go out much too far. There can be a strong, pulling tide—as there was on that Saturday—and an undertow. Sometimes there are riptides beyond the cove's shelter. The guards are alert and quick, and usually the sudden excitement ends happily, but on this afternoon it didn't.

Mary and Liz, standing at the edge of the water, bemused by the sudden turn of events and frightened, watched while the guards rowed back to shore with the body of a young woman, a woman Mary knew, with a stunned, superstitious certainty, would be Carol James. They listened, shocked and silent, to a chorus of voices around them repeating, in conflicting dissonance, what the various bystanders thought had happened.

"She drowned. I saw her. A wave hit her smack in the face. She must have swallowed a lot of water. She just went under and drowned. Just like that."

"No, she hit her head on a rock. That's why she went under. I noticed her earlier. She was a good swimmer."

"Maybe she was caught under the reef, and couldn't breathe."

"She must have had a cramp. She just doubled up and sank. I saw her go under, but I was too far away. There was no way I could get to her in time."

"Nobody was near enough."

"Yes, there was! I saw a frogman swimming near her just before the guard shouted."

"That was a shark. I saw it too, swimming under the surface, very near the place where she went under."

Several people had seen the shark, or the frogman—had seen something; but they were drowned out by the ones who had seen nothing.

"She was alone when the guards reached her. She'd been alone all along, swimming out farther than anybody else. She had seemed to know what she was doing."

"That couldn't have been another swimmer out there—he couldn't just vanish, could he? It must have been a seagull riding on a kelp bed."

"There was a similar drowning last summer, in almost exactly the same spot, remember?"

"I wouldn't swim near there for anything!"

Nobody knew who she was until Liz Ferguson walked, reluctantly, over to the beached boat and spoke Carol's name softly, her voice

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uncertain because she was crying. Mary didn't belong there, knew herself to be an ironic intrusion. She spoke soft commiserations, then went quietly away, allowing Liz to look after her friend alone.

But she was loath to go home. It was as though she no longer had a home. She was dazed by the sudden tragedy coming so swiftly on the wake of other violent and conflicting emotions, coming as inevitably, it seemed to her, as the waves which battered the shore cliffs. She wondered with an unreasonable, hopeless dread what the next wave would be like.

She circled La Jolla, driving her car up and down the curving hills blindly, out of tune with the summer's brilliance. Varicolored tropical plants under tall palms, sharp greens and the rival blues of sky and ocean taunted her bleak, solitary mood. She didn't belong in this sunlit world any more. She didn't belong anywhere. With a frisson of horror, she found herself driving, once again, past the stairs which went down to the cove. Numb, unthinking, she turned her car and took the long way back to San Diego, dawdling in the slow lanes, delaying the inevitable.

What would she tell George? How could she explain how she knew? What could she possibly say to him?

George Hitchman was home when she arrived—frantic with worry, he told her.

"Why frantic?" she said, surprised. "I'm not late. I always go to the cove on Saturday."

"What have you done to your hair?" he asked, staring at her wildly. "What's that green thing you're wearing? You've never had a bikini. You don't like bikinis! Where's your blue suit? What have you done to your hair? . . . My God! *Oh, my God!* I told him you had long brown hair on top of your head. And a blue suit. I showed him where you always sit."

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 575th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a bold debut in the world of fictional detection; even before the author knew his first story would be published, he planned to make his detective, Feng Da-wei, a series character . . .

The author, Ta Huang Chi, was born in 1927. He has been a ship's officer and a guided-missile engineer. At present he is writing and illustrating a book on Chinese chess. He has no hobbies, but admits he "dabbles in Chinese poetry, computer programming, and a bit of clay sculpting when the mood is upon me" . . .

THE SHANGHAI GOLD BARS

by TA HUANG CHI

PROLOGUE

Feng Da-wei was born in July of 1900. The exact date is unknown, but his baptismal certificate and the records of the Evangelical Gospel Order in St. Louis, Missouri indicate July 20th. This date is surely accurate within a day either way, since the Feng baby was only two or three days old at the time he came into the keeping of Reverend and Mrs. Myles Stainford.

In May of that year the Stainfords received a letter at their mission in Lingtan ordering them to report at Shanghai in August to act as resident instructors to newly arrived groups of missionaries—missionaries whose knowledge of China and the Chinese consisted of little more than colorful fictions current in the American midwest. The letter had taken a month to reach them.

In early June the Reverend and Mrs. Parkinson arrived in Lingtan to replace the Stainfords. They arrived with several cases of Bibles

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and some ugly, but unconfirmed, rumors.

In July, satisfied that his replacement was now familiar with the mission and local conditions, Reverend Stainford and his wife started their long journey to the coast. It would take them twelve days, traveling by mule cart, to reach the first of several rivers that would eventually carry them to Shanghai.

On the evening of the tenth day they reached what once had been a small farming village, but was now gray ashes on dark brown earth. Black, wide-winged birds circled above, while others strutted, grotesquely fed, across the corpses in the street. Here, the ugly rumors had become an uglier reality. They searched for survivors and found two—a young woman, unconscious, one out-flung arm charred to the bone, with a newborn baby clutched in the other. The baby slept fitfully on the mother's bloodstained blouse.

They made night camp near a small stream several *li* beyond the village where they took turns sleeping and watching over the woman. Myles Stainford was beside her when, during the fifth hour of starlight, she opened her eyes, called softly for her husband, and died. Two days later three weary people reached the river.

After selling the cart and both mules, they took a mud-floored room at an inn and set about arranging for supplies and a sampan to take them downriver at first light.

Later, on that powder-dry Chinese night, the Reverend and Mrs. Stainford hurried across the walled courtyard of the district magistrate's *yamen,* bid a polite *tsai chen* to the frightened watchmen at the gate, and walked back down the dusty street leading to the inn. The elderly magistrate had confirmed the wild tales they had heard along the waterfront.

After the first minutes of prescribed polite questions of health and family had been mutually asked and replied to, one terrible phrase had dominated the conversation—I Ho Chuan—The Society of Righteous Fists. The English-language press had dubbed them "Boxers" and had not taken them too seriously in the beginning. Now the whole world would hear of them.

The Boxers had risen in their thousands, cut all lines of communication between the capital and the sea to the east, and even as they spoke, were besieging the foreign legations in Peking. Missionaries, the hated Je-so teachers, were being hunted down and killed. Missions burned. Chinese converts butchered.

"You must think of your wife. Flee to a treaty port, honored friend," the magistrate had said. "You are not safe even in my own

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poor house. Your mission at Lingtan is now ashes and the Je-so, Parkinson, is dead with all his family and servants. *Liao pu te!* Fearful, fearful!"

It is written that God moves in mysterious ways. Reverend Stainford never questioned these ways and never, like some, cried out, "Why me, Lord?" It wasn't lack of faith that stayed his words but fear of the booming reply, "Why not, Stainford?" This explains, in part, why a certain Chinese baby did not end up in a specific church orphanage when the Stainfords finally arrived in Shanghai that August.

Martha Stainford loved babies. Myles Stainford liked children but disliked babies, and this particular baby reminded him of a boiled Chinese owl. Whenever he mentioned the church orphanage as the proper place for the baby—after all, the church would certainly be sending them back to the interior when their present work was complete—a look would come in her eyes. A look of such pained longing that he reluctantly agreed to keep the baby until they were assigned to a new mission. He also agreed that David would be a fine name for the baby. From the mother's dying words he knew that the family name was Feng. David, in Chinese, became Da-wei, and it was as Feng Da-wei that he was baptized on the following Sunday.

In the months that followed, Myles Stainford went about his work content in the knowledge that his role of temporary father would soon end.

It ended later at night that Christmas Eve when they were told to leave for Kwangsi province before the Chinese New Year began on February 19th. Sometime around midnight Martha had quietly got out of bed. Half an hour went by. He found her sitting crosslegged among the small presents around their candle-lit Christmas tree. She was staring at a floppy-eared, gingham-vested bunny propped at the base of the tree as she rocked the sleeping David in her arms. Her face was that of a mother holding her child for the last time, waiting for that nameless, uninvited thing that never knocks and, without speaking, takes away all light forever. Moving quietly, Myles sat down beside his wife and gingerly took the child into his own arms.

On February 14th in 1901, the Stainford family arrived in Kwangsi. The unpacking of a floppy-eared, gingham-vested rabbit was duly noted by an intelligent pair of small dark eyes peering from a teakwood cradle . . .

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A rain squall born of the great Tai Hu Lake left its watery womb at noon, swept east in a broad gray pattern across farmlands, blotted from sight the towering pagodas, and wove itself into the latticework of canals that made Soochow the Venice of China. The advance winds of the storm played onto a checkerboard of courtyarded homes, sending a foam of flower petals after the specks of birds fleeing to quieter horizons.

At one of these comfortable, walled homes the wind flicked off a heavy roofing tile and planed it clattering along the eaves of the study.

Two men sat in the paneled room below the storm. Each man knew only the sound of his pen nib scraping across paper.

One of these men was a balding, stockily built American in his early thirties with a short-stemmed bulldog pipe burning perilously close beneath a luxuriant walrus mustache the size of a shoe brush. The pipe smoke, drifting upward through this formidable red growth, created the image of a smoldering sunset over Vesuvius or a Pittsburgh slag heap glowing fitfully in the dusk.

Between puffs Gordon Pymm took another sheet of paper and let his pen—re-phrasing his thoughts as politely as possible—state that the rumored existence of an easily worked deposit of manganese ore in the Kang-tsu district could only have been the product of a mind in the last stages of decay.

He concluded his part of the report to the Western Seas Mining Syndicate and reread the results with satisfaction. Professional objectivity had triumphed over his personal feelings.

The survey had been made difficult enough by mountainous terrain and record bad weather, alternating between sudden snows and chilling rains.

Gordon accepted these things, as would any civil engineer working across a hostile landscape. But when a landscape becomes so hostile that it emits nine-millimeter bullets, the profession loses some of its appeal.

Gordon sealed the report in a manila envelope and began sorting through the mail that had accumulated in his absence. Two engineering magazines and a package with the return address of a New York bookstore were placed to one side unopened. *Flood Control in Large River Basins* and *The Design of Silting Dams In High Erosion Areas* could wait.

Behind Gordon, on the canal side of the study, a tall broad-shouldered man with the lithe build of a long-distance swimmer sat at

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a massive rolltop dresk. A collection of framed photographs, mostly black and whites but with a few duotones and hand-tinted ones among them, covered the wall behind his desk and overflowed toward the courtyard door.

Feng Da-wei put aside his pen, picked up his writing brush, and began a letter to his mother in St. Louis. The large strong hand holding the brush floated effortlessly above the paper as the fine tip laid down flowing columns of Chinese characters in the Tsao Tzu style of calligraphy his mother had taught him. David spoke to her of the report he had just completed, and of other things.

The brush took more ink and made word-pictures of her son; first, as a threadbare Taoist priest along the mountain backroads, then as an itinerant herb doctor with a wooden chest of leaves, roots, seeds, and oils slung across his shoulder by a leather strap as he plied his profession in small villages.

As the priest who sold *wen yi kwei* charms and as the doctor who dispensed small powders with quotes from the *Pen Ts'ao* healings, he observed all things closely, asked many questions, and listened well.

From these weeks of gathering he had distilled his intelligence report to the Syndicate.

David passed lightly over the bandit attack on the survey camp and gave full credit for the camp's survival to the unholy fear inspired in the superstitious bandits by Gordon's dragon-smoke mustache.

A few pages later he washed and laid aside the writing brush. Pressing the face of his stone *chuan* stick against a pad of vermilion ink, he stamped his personal "chop" below his signature.

He stood up from the desk to flex his arms and shoulders. His soft brown robe, worked with a narrow pattern of yellow thread along the edges and cuffs, yielded to the movements as water yields to the swimmer.

From the courtyard doorway he watched the trailing skirts of the squall move eastward to the sea.

Then he turned toward Gordon at his desk, and in his pronounced midwestern accent said, "The sky is clearing up over Tai Hu Lake. I wonder what riled it up so?"

"There is a perfectly logical explanation for it, David." Gordon folded the letter he had been reading and replaced it in its envelope. "I saw a shooting star last night. Judging from its direction I would say it fell smack in the lake."

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David shook his head in mock sadness. "You are beginning to sound like a superstitious backcountry Chinese. Either a bandit bullet hit you in the head or you've been in China too long."

"And I expect to be here a lot longer if this letter from Charles Ketty is any indication. He wants me to be resident engineer for a dredging project on the Grand Canal." The corners of his red mustache lifted above an impish smile. "No more bandits. No more bullets."

"Congratulations, Gordon, and who is Mr. Ketty?"

"He was a guest lecturer at my college. I worked in his drafting section at Chicago Dredge and Marine during my last summer at school. He's a good man. Taught me a lot in those three months."

"When will you see him?"

"When we go to Shanghai with our reports. I'd like you to meet him."

David motioned toward the Tai Hu Lake. "Fine. Our boat will get us in there sometime early in the afternoon—if there are no more shooting stars."

Soochow Creek, the Broadway of Shanghai, was bustling with launches, sampans piled with fresh vegetables, houseboats, and freight barges. Shanghai was built on water commerce. From the thousand-mile-long Grand Canal, along Soochow Creek and the Whangpoo River into which it flowed, and down the mighty Yangtze, a thousand different cargoes met and mingled in this great seaport.

As the craft carrying David and Gordon neared the boat landing beyond Garden Bridge, David heard his name called in Chinese. From the poop of a small junk, a man and a little girl waved and shouted a greeting.

David's face broke into a smile. He waved both arms and shouted back across the sunlit waters, "Lao Erh! *I lo ping an!*" as the two craft swept by each other.

"Who is the cute little girl, David?"

"She is called Little Orchid. Her father, Lao Erh, owns the boat."

As their suitcases were being brought ashore, Gordon relit his pipe and looked at David. "There was something about Little Orchid—a look, if you will—that seemed strange."

David could feel the sadness come over his face. "Oxygen aphasia. She fell overboard a few years ago and struck her head on something in the water. Nearly drowned. When they finally got her back on board, her heart had stopped beating. She was revived and they

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saved her life—if you could still call living in a damaged mind any kind of life." He turned back to the boat. "Get us a couple of rickshaws, will you, Gordy, while I pay off our skipper. We'll finish our business at the bank first and then I'd like to pay a courtesy call on Lao Erh and his family. I'll join you and Mr. Ketty at the Astor House bar about four."

A cool breeze from the river fluttered the cloth banners strung between the stalls in the market square. David paid the butcher and put a package of fresh pork into the net shopping bag hanging from his wrist. He found a candy stall and bought a large paper of sugared plums. The pork was his calling gift for Lao Erh's kitchen. The sugared plums would get him a shy smile and kiss from Little Orchid. He slung the net bag over his shoulder and walked toward the river.

Out on the muddy Whangpoo a big high-pooped Ningpo junk with a great eye painted on its bow slipped by on its way to the sea and a six-hundred-mile return journey south to Foochow for another cargo of building timbers. Several more of these ponderous seagoing junks, with piles of poles lashed to their decks, were anchored in the stream. David worked his way through the crowded street toward the Inn of the Eight Immortals a few blocks downstream from the market where Lao Erh moored his boat while he was ashore hustling cargo for the upriver towns.

Near the inn he detoured around some workmen mixing whitewash in the doorway of a godown. The mingled, musty odors of a hundred old cargoes wafted to him from the dark interior of the low-roofed warehouse.

A jumble of lighters, small junks, and sampans were tied up side by side and end to end along the river bank in front of the Inn of the Eight Immortals. Little Orchid was alone, sunning her pet canary at the foot of the ship's mast. David sat down beside her and put the net bag between them on the deck.

"Do you remember me, Little Orchid?"

She clapped her hands together and laughed up at him. "Yes. I saw you on the boat with a *yang kuei tze,* a foreign devil with a funny dragon-flame mustache."

"That was my friend. He's one of the good foreign devils." David held out the net bag to her. "Here's a present for you."

Little Orchid solemnly took the bag from his hands, stood up, and walked to the rail of the boat. Holding the bag out over the river,

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she muttered a short prayer and dropped the bag. David heard the splash as four pounds of pork and a pound of sugared plums headed for the bottom of the Whangpoo. He could not have been more surprised if Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, had suddenly kicked him in the least bony part of his anatomy.

Little Orchid sat down beside him again, and with a shy smile on her face asked, "Do you like my canary?"

"Yes. It's a beautiful canary." David waited the space of a couple of breaths and in a mild tone asked her, "Why did you do that?"

"The River God is sick. I sacrifice to make him well again."

David drew up his long legs and rested his chin on his knees. "How do you know the River God is sick?"

"He must be. He swallowed a *yang kuei tze* last night."

David nodded understandingly. "Swallowing foreign devils is certainly bad joss, even for a River God." He stood up and smiled down at the child. "I'm sure he'll be well soon. Tell your mother and father I'll visit them tomorrow."

David returned ashore and hired a rickshaw to take him to the Astor House Hotel. Behind him, the River God was quietly disposing of a fresh-pork and sugared-plum lunch. He thought about it for a while and came to the conclusion that somewhere on this bright and cloudless day there was a half-drowned American sailor nursing a hangover while he scrubbed the decks of a gunboat and thought of his next shore leave.

The after-business crowd was trickling into the bar of the Astor House Hotel when David arrived. Gordon Pymm and a tall thin man with a sunken chest were deep in conversation at a corner table. Their solemn faces were not what David had expected of a meeting of two old friends. David stopped at the bar and ordered a shandygaff and a bowl of melon seeds sent to the table. He nodded politely to the Eurasian pearl dealer seated at the center table with two Japanese businessmen and followed the waiter to Gordon's table.

"David, this is Charles Ketty. We've been sitting here going over the bad news."

Mr. Ketty shook David's hand as if David were a long-lost brother. "Mr. Feng. You don't know how glad I am to meet you. According to Gordon here, you might be able to do me a great favor."

David said to Gordon, "What's this about bad news?"

"It looks like the Grand Canal job is off—if it ever existed. Charles has apparently been the victim of a confidence scheme and he—his

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company—is out a sizable number of double eagles. The people at the Shanghai Merchants Bank thought you might be able to help me, I don't see much hope in it." He turned to his downcast guest. "Tell David what happened this afternoon, Charlie."

"I had an appointment with Mr. Beazley this afternoon at the Tientsin Club. He was to be there with an official from the Bureau of Inland Waterways. This official was to sign the dredging contract on behalf of the Chinese government. I was to sign for my company and the whole thing would be in the bag. This is why I was sent all the way out here from Chicago, Mr. Feng."

"Who is Beazley?"

"I thought—that is to say, my company in Chicago thought—that Mr. Beazley was a reputable intermediary with the Chinese government. According to his letters to us, he had successfully represented several European and American firms in obtaining lucrative engineering contracts from the Chinese. We do a good business overseas, most of it in South America. But things have been slack lately, so we jumped at the chance to establish ourselves in the Far East. The Grand Canal dredging project was right down our alley. Just what we needed."

David shifted in his chair. "Mr. Ketty, you say you thought Mr. Beazley was a reputable intermediary. What did he do at the Tientsin Club this afternoon that made you change your mind?"

"Nothing, Mr. Feng. Beazley never showed up for the meeting."

"And the Chinese government representative?"

Charles Ketty shook his head, "Neither one. I hung around until mid-afternoon thinking they might have been delayed. I finally left word with the club manager and went around to Beazley's hotel. He had checked out. Hoof, hide, hair, and tallow, with no forwarding address. Then I thought of the money."

"Had you paid him an advance against his commission?"

Charles Ketty looked down at the table top for several seconds and then at Gordon.

"Squeeze. Bribe money," said Gordon, supplying the words for his friend. "Charles is an engineer, and a damn good one to boot, but he's no China hand. Before you arrived, I was trying to explain to him that squeeze is a way of life here. If you want to do business you have to grease the bureau chief and the right government minister or you'll go home with an empty rice bowl. Before Beazley checked out of his hotel he checked out of the bank with fifteen thousand dollars that wasn't exactly his."

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David gave a low whistle. "Did he forge your signature, Mr. Ketty?"

"He didn't have to, Mr. Feng. A few days before I left Chicago we received a cablegram from Beazley advising us that a French firm was bidding against us and if we didn't meet or better their bribe offer immediately we could kiss the contract goodbye. Like I said, things have been a little slack for us and we needed this contract. So we arranged a telegraphic transfer of funds between our bank in Chicago and Mr. Beazley's account at the Shanghai Merchants Bank. Yesterday morning, after we agreed to meet at the Tientsin Club, he withdrew the entire amount in the form of Shanghai gold bars. The clerk at the bullion window told me he watched Beazley load the bars into the pockets of a heavy canvas vest. That was the last anyone saw of him until about an hour ago when the Harbor Police fished him out of the Whangpoo River. He had been killed with a single knife thrust through the heart."

"Did you recover the gold bars?"

Mr. Ketty leaned forward slightly in his chair. "That is the great favor I want to ask you, Mr. Feng."

David Feng changed out of his American style street clothes into a pair of silk slippers and the loose comfort of his favorite brown robe. Gordon had gone out earlier to visit Madame Wu, whom he described simply as a "charming woman from San Antonio" and the proprietress of a "resort" on Kiansi Road.

He poured himself a cup of tea. As he sipped its fragrant warmth in the quiet of his room, he set his mind to stringing the beads of information he had collected that evening.

Professor Linwood, a missionary teaching at the Shanghai Law College, had a hobby. While other men of his age might boast collections of exotic butterflies or rare stamps, Bert Linwood collected information. His files, dating from 1910, were devoted solely to swindlers and flimflam artists who plied their trade on the China coast. "A harmless diversion, Mr. Feng, and one I'm sure your late father would not have disapproved of," he once said. "Sinful rascals, all of them, but the many shades and hues of their misspent lives provide an acceptable chromatic substitute for a man, such as myself, who has been color blind from birth."

The thin file on Alvin Arthur Beazley indicated no specialty and, for that matter, no particular talent. It was the sad portrait of a loser as inept at his dreamings as at life. He had been stationed in

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the Philippine Islands as a corporal in the Quartermaster Corps from which he was dishonorably discharged in 1922 after serving ninety days in the stockade for misappropriation of government supplies. Big dreams. Petty theft.

His dreams of making it big led him to Shanghai, where no passports were required and no questions were asked. He got a job as a warehouse superintendent for an American export company. His quartermaster experience brought him a raise. He began to dream of bigger and better jobs. The dreams continued, but the job ended abruptly when his employers discovered that he knew more about boats with false bottoms than an honest employee should. Big dreams. Petty theft.

"And where," David inquired of the room, "is the chance path this loser found that led him to bars of gold and the muddy Whangpoo?"

For at the end of this path was a canvas vest containing sixty-three Shanghai gold bars, each weighing ten Chauping *taels*. These three-and-a-half-inch standard bars were a half inch thick and nearly an inch wide. Such bars were recently quoted at $238.19 on the Shanghai Gold Stock Exchange. David was about to assay a few guesses just as Gordon returned from Madame Wu's.

He was smartly dressed for an evening on the town. There was a trace of lipstick on his left cheek. A yellow Texas rose sprouted from the buttonhole of his lapel.

"You certainly look the better for wear, Gordon. Shall I put the flower in some fresh water?"

Gordon took off his coat and sat down. "It is altogether obvious, Mr. Feng, that you are a young and unpolished heathen." He helped himself to a cup of tea. "If it weren't for the fact that I have spent my life performing good works among the less fortunate such as yourself, I would bounce this teapot off your benighted skull." He freed himself from a dark blue tie and unbuttoned his collar. "The evening was a fruitful one. I shall now report to you on it—omitting only those things a true gentleman never discusses.

"According to Virginia—Madame Wu to you—our Mr. Beazley had been a frequent visitor. He was known for a loose mouth and a tight wallet. Up until a few weeks ago he was a Friday-night regular. No one in the place—I checked with the bartender and a few others—saw him again until last Wednesday night. They remember it well because he actually bought a round of drinks and tipped the bartender."

Gordon paused and raised a finger. "Now here's the interesting

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part. That same evening he shared a bottle of house champagne with Madame Wu. Between bouts of the bubbly he hinted that his ship was about to come in.

"In a jocular sort of way Madame Wu asked him if he meant his ship of fortune. To this, Beazley replied, 'If that's what you call a Ningpo junk then the answer might be . . .' " Gordon's voice trailed off as he shrugged.

"Go on," David urged. "Might be what?"

"That's as far as he got. Some drunk wandered over from the bar and Beazley clammed up. A few minutes later he got up and left. Poof! Never seen again."

"Curiouser and curiouser," David mused. "I imagine Madame Wu attached no more value to this hollow pretense of great expectations than it deserved at the time. He had probably bored his acquaintances with similar stories of impending great wealth until no one took him seriously." He told Gordon what he had learned from Professor Linwood and then added, "I talked to Captain Huang Liu of the Harbor Police. He questioned people in the area where Beazley's body was found and learned nothing. Not surprising. Beazley could have been killed anywhere ashore and his body dumped in the river."

"Or killed on a boat," added Gordon. "They could have quietly slipped him into the Whangpoo River without a ripple or witness."

"True enough. Now to the question of motive. It would appear that Beazley was killed for the gold bars, although there may be something beyond that."

"What brought that to mind? There is more than enough motive in the gold bars."

"On the surface, Gordon, I have to agree. But why gold? Beazley could have just as easily withdrawn the money in paper currency—it would certainly have weighed a lot less. No, I have a feeling that the form of this sudden wealth was no less important than the wealth itself. The Shanghai Gold Stock Exchange on Kiukiang Road is the largest trading center dealing in these gold bars. There are others, including the Chartered Stock and Produce Exchange. Standard bar gold is a common unit of exchange in banking and international finance. In many cases it is better than money in China."

Gordon took a few thoughtful puffs at his unlit pipe. "That would imply that Beazley had indeed hit on something big. Maybe too big. Where does that leave us?"

"I don't know."

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Gordon stood up and draped his coat over his arm. "Maybe Ketty will remember something that might help. We're having breakfast at the Cathay tomorrow. Care to join us?"

David shook his head. "I missed Lao Erh today. If I leave early enough in the morning, I can probably catch him before he sets out upriver. Ask Mr. Ketty if we could meet for dinner tonight."

An early-morning fog muffled the sights and sounds along the Whangpoo River. Shop banners hung limply in the gray light filtering down through the mists. An occasional sound came from ships anchored on a darker grayness, where sailors waited for the sun and an idling wind to set them free. Only a few carts moved on the street outside the entrance to the Inn of the Eight Immortals. Here the dank airs of the river yielded at the door to the warmer air and richer smells of charcoal fires and simmering food.

David gave these an appreciative sniff. When his stomach voted one to nothing, he entered and seated himself at a back bench near the open doorway that led from the eating area to the inn rooms in the rear courtyard. He was about to reach inside his quilted jacket for the narrow ebony case containing his chopsticks when he heard the pause of straw-sandaled feet behind him. He looked up into the smiling face of Lao Erh.

"Have you had your morning rice, Da-wei?"

David motioned to the bench. "Not yet, old friend. And you?"

Lao Erh sat down and beckoned to a waiter. "I have come to take food to the boat. Little Orchid and I do not feel like cooking this morning. My wife is visiting relatives ashore. But I will share tea with you."

The waiter placed two steaming bowls of tea on the bench and left with their orders. "How is Little Orchid this morning?" David asked.

Lao Erh took a partially smoked Rose Blossom cigarette from his pocket and lit it from a hanging lamp. He exhaled the smoke and sadly shook his head. "The water sprite still possesses her. She offers sacrifice to the River God and talks of a strange man with the sun in his belly. I'm glad her mother is not here to see this. She has burned incense enough before our Lady Kuan Yin."

"And how is business? Good, I hope," said David, changing to a less painful subject.

Lao Erh brightened. "At least some of our prayers are heard. Ling Fu, a man from Shansi, has hired my boat to take some cases of tools upriver. He has paid me in silver."

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Lao Erh looked about to see if anyone could hear him. Then in a lower tone he said, "He has paid me twice the amount I would have asked and brings three men with him to replace my crew. When I protested this, he offered to pay my crew's wages while they sit idle ashore. He is blasphemous and curses the gods. I think he has the evil eye. He is not the man I would choose for a journey, but I will need a new sail before winter and who am I to turn away good silver?"

"These cases of tools, Lao Erh, I did not see them when I talked to Little Orchid yesterday. Are you loading them now?"

"No, he and the three ruffians he calls his crew will do that tonight. After it is dark I am to take my boat a short distance from here where a Ningpo junk lies at anchor. The cases will be off-loaded from the junk. Then I will tie up along shore to wait for daylight before sailing upriver."

Something stirred in David's mind at the mention of a Ningpo junk. He raised the tea bowl to his mouth and took a few thoughtful sips. Beazley's words to Madame Wu came back to him. Could this be the "ship of fortune" in that last, uncompleted remark? But there was another phrase Lao Erh had spoken earlier that brought back a picture of Little Orchid, four pounds of pork, and a pound of sugared plums. He tried to think. What was it? The thought of his good friend Lao Erh being involved with a man like Beazley made him feel sick. He nearly dropped his tea bowl. "The River God is sick!"

A startled Lao Erh looked at him. "Your thoughts have been soaring above Mount Tai, elder brother. Are you well?"

"Who is the strange man?"

A look of pity came over Lao Erh's face. "I see no strange man, Da-wei."

"Not here. The one on your boat. Little Orchid told you she saw a strange man with the sun in his belly. Who was he?"

Lao Erh's face relaxed. "The *yang kuei tze?* A foreign devil with the sun in his belly? Surely, Da-wei, you do not believe the phantoms of my poor daughter's mind? You are a scholar. You have traveled beyond the Western Sea to their lands, but even you have never seen a foreign devil with the sun in his belly. If such a one were to come aboard my poor boat, I would be frightened to my grave. Think what my wife would say!"

"Your wife did not see him. Nor did you or any member of your crew. But he was there, and Little Orchid saw him. Your eyes tell me you think I have lost my wits. Listen, and I will tell you a story

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about a thief who dreamed too much."

When David finished speaking, a wide-eyed Lao Erh said, *"Liao pu te!* What fearful men are these who come to me? To me, a simple boatman, who asks little from this life! What shall I do?"

"First, I want you to describe these men to me. What did their leader look like? The man who hired you?"

Lao Erh held his hands out a few feet apart. "He is about this wide at the shoulders," he said. "Average height, but thick, strong. Heavy like a wrestler or boxer. His hair is long and he wears a red sweatband tied across his forehead. And a pin. There is a small jade pin in the sweatband. As I said before, he spoke in a coarse Shansi dialect."

"And the three crewmen, did you see them too?"

Lao Erh struck the bench with his fist. *"Hun tan!* Rotten eggs! All of them. Yes, I saw them—may fox spirits take them all. Two were about my size. The other was very thin and tall, but not so tall as you, Da-wei. They, too, spoke the Shansi dialect."

The waiter handed a warm package of food to Lao Erh and a bowl of meat dumplings and rice to David. Lao Erh gave the waiter a few coppers and stood up to go.

"There are two things you must promise to do," David said to him. "Don't arouse any suspicion in their minds, and don't leave Little Orchid alone on the boat until after this is over."

Lao Erh nodded. Clutching the food under his arm, he hurried to the street.

David took out his chopsticks and put the "nimble lads" to work. He had almost forgotten how hungry he was. The first dumpling vanished in a few quick movements of the chopsticks.

His first thoughts were for the safety of Lao Erh and Little Orchid. The Harbor Police had a station less than a mile away. Captain Huang could slip a few men on board Lao Erh's boat at dusk and have an armed steam launch nearby with a boarding party in readiness. Lao Erh and his daughter could then be moved to a neighboring boat out of harm's way. Ling Fu and his rogues would walk into a trap. The gold bars they carried would be enough evidence to send them to the headsman.

David speculated that Beazley had visited the boat with Ling Fu. It would be like him to insist on savoring every aspect of his unfolding dream. With all the arrangements completed, Ling Fu would have demanded to see the gold. Beazley must have shown him the vest of gold bars hidden under his clothing. This would be Little

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Orchid's "man with the sun in his belly" that had worried Lao Erh. In that moment Beazley ceased to be a business asset. Ling Fu then dissolved their partnership in the Whangpoo River. The mysterious "cases of tools" and the gold bars could then change hands with no one the wiser.

David cleaned his chopsticks and put them in their case beneath his jacket. The fog was lifting. Working-day sounds returned to the street. A shabby-robed Taoist priest with a wooden begging bowl entered from the courtyard and passed among the tables. The customers offered him more silence than coins. David put three silver pieces in the outstretched bowl and walked out onto the street to the accompaniment of many scriptural blessings.

He passed the godown with its crew of painters applying the last whitewash to its interior. Beyond the market he could see the flag of the Harbor Police near the ferry landing. Traffic was moving again on the Whangpoo.

The armed steam launch was not at the Harbor Police dock. A sergeant told him Captain Huang had been called downriver. David wrote out a description of Ling Fu and his men and left it with the sergeant. "Tell Captain Huang I'll be back around noon. Those four have to be staying close by." The sergeant suggested a wine shop called The Green Phoenix run by a Shansi man.

The proprietor of The Green Phoenix proved to be a monument to discreet ignorance. He suggested a brothel in Joss Alley. It took David half an hour to find the brothel. He collected only a string of curses from the bleary-eyed madame who showed a neat turn of phrase. He left this gutter virtuoso still screaming from a second-story window and resumed his search through the foul alleys of the *hutung*.

Five hours and as many miles later he emerged from the alleyways and narrow streets. It was noon. He was tired and hungry. Captain Huang would have to wait a few minutes.

The Inn of the Eight Immortals was crowded to near capacity. From the doorway he could see an empty seat at an eating bench occupied by three men. David considered joining them. As he hesitated, they were joined by a fourth man with long hair and the muscular build of a boxer or wrestler. There was a small jade pin in the dirty red sweatband around his head. Two of his companions were of average height and build. The other was tall and thin. Ling Fu and company were taking their noon rice.

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A crowd collected outside the inn when the four Shansi men were marched out followed by Captain Huang brandishing a pistol too big for his small hand. Captain Huang Liu was enjoying himself. He paced up and down before the prisoners and waited. Two policemen armed with rifles stood behind them. A sergeant emerged from the inn.

"The gold isn't in their room, Captain," he reported, "but I found this knife."

Captain Huang holstered his pistol and examined the double-edged dagger. "Where is the gold?" he bellowed at the prisoners. There was a long silence. "Which one of you dung-heaped sons of a turtle murdered the foreign devil?" Again there was silence. Captain Huang sighed. "So you wish to travel the path of pain." He motioned to the sergeant. "Take them to the station. There are ways to oil rusty tongues."

David took Captain Huang to one side. After a few moments of whispered conversation the captain gravely nodded his head. "An excellent thought, Mr. Feng. I'll meet you there." Captain Huang turned to his sergeant. "March these beauties to the godown!" he snarled.

The painters at the godown put their brushes aside to join the crowd gathering in front of the windowless warehouse. Captain Huang waved the throng to silence and delivered a long speech about the longer arm of justice under the new Republic of China. He was beginning to repeat himself when the voice of an old man in the rear of the crowd cried out, *"Chieh kuang! Chieh kuang!* Make way! Make way for the Summoner of Spirits."

All eyes turned to a shabbily robed Taoist priest, supporting his twisted body with a staff as he made his painful way toward the prisoners.

Captain Huang stepped back a pace from this hooded apparition. One of its hands was hidden in the long dusty sleeve of a robe while the other hand, trembling and streaked with the grayness of death, clung feebly to the supportive staff. The crowd shrank back as though a cold wind had blown from the ashes of a dead fire.

The neck of the apparition was bent forward and down as one who has for too long gazed on the numbered hells of the underworld. No light fell on this face. The blackness beneath the hood swung with hideous slowness back and forth before the faces of the frightened prisoners. It was like watching an ancient cobra bestirred from its guardianship over a long-lost temple.

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"There!" The other gray-streaked hand emerged from its sleeve and pointed to the black interior of the godown. "Take them," the voice croaked, "and place them therein. Let them stand apart, facing the wall. Close the door. Seal them in darkness for nine times nine heartbeats."

The specter let his outstretched hand join its withered companion on the staff. "In silence will come the God of the River. Water sprites shall prepare his way for the marking of guilt upon the back of him who killed the *yang kuei tze.* Go! Let it be done."

Captain Huang released the hold his hand had instinctively taken on the butt of his holstered pistol. No word was spoken, no order was given as the prisoners were driven into the godown. They were placed five paces apart facing the wall. Willing hands swung shut the doors. After what seemed more like a thousand heartbeats than eighty-one, the old priest gave a slight motion with the head of his staff.

The doors were opened. Four frightened men stumbled out into the sunlight. Captain Huang lined them up facing the doorway, their backs to the crowd. A moan of terror went up from the crowd.

"Seize him!" David Feng shouted, straightening up and throwing back the deep cowl that had obscured his face. "That one, with the white mark on his back."

Ling Fu pivoted. With eye-popping ferocity he drove his fist into Captain Huang's belly. Ling Fu reached out to either side, seized two soldiers in an iron grip, and smashed them together like exploding cymbals. A rifle went off. The murderer rushed forward in a crouch, locked his powerful arms around David's legs, and threw him over his shoulder to crash against the godown wall. The terrified crowd opened and closed behind Ling's bellowing charge and berserk rage, and Ling was gone.

David had a dazed, worm's-eye view of a soldier holding a rifle on three trembling prisoners. Two painters helped Captain Huang to his feet. The onlookers volubly compared notes with each other.

A sergeant chained the hands of the prisoners. At a command from Captain Huang they were assembled in marching order with ropes linking their necks together. David sorted himself out from the empty paint buckets and bits of broken scaffolding. He took off the borrowed robe, now reduced to whitewashed tatters, and scrubbed his hands and face in a water barrel.

"It was a great plan, Feng Da-wei." Captain Huang moistened a handkerchief from the water barrel and wiped his face. "We found

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the murderer, but I fear we have lost him forever and the vest of gold bars as well. I'll send a party into the *hutungs* to look for him, but I can't search every Ningpo junk in the Shanghai area."

"The loss of face is mine, Captain. I should have anticipated his reaction." David felt the lump on his head. "By the Great Fo he is a wicked fighter!"

"Wicked and stupid as well." Captain Huang watched the prisoners being marched away followed by the jeering crowd. "Those three sons of turtles blame Ling Fu for the bad luck that fell upon them. They say he spat at a shooting star a few nights ago. The gods are unforgiving in such matters."

David bundled up the tattered robe. "There is an old priest sitting in a cold room at the Inn of the Eight Immortals. With your permission, Captain, I'll stop at the market and buy him a new robe to cover his nakedness."

Captain Huang laughed. "By all means. Clothe his naked Reverence and give him my thanks."

His head hurt. The lump on his scalp throbbed. He was in no mood to haggle. David paid full asking price to the astonished seller of robes and delivered the garment to a grateful priest, made more grateful still by an additional gift of cash from his apologetic benefactor.

David's thoughts turned to Lao Erh, who by now was probably in an apprehensive sweat awaiting sundown and calamity. He returned to the market and bought a large cut of fresh pork and a paper of sugared plums. This was one gift he did not want to end up at the bottom of the Whangpoo in the stomach of the River God.

He found Little Orchid sitting on a small teakwood chest with a bowl of cooked rice in her hand. He watched the child take individual grains of rice from the bowl and add them to others that formed the outline of a bird on the deck planks. She was smiling and humming. David put his parcels on the hatch cover and walked aft to the master cabin.

Lao Erh was holding a wet cloth to the side of his face. His chin was smeared with blood from a split lower lip. He sank down on a stool and moaned through the compress, "He was here."

David didn't have to ask who. Ling Fu had left his signature on the smashed furniture and Lao Erh's face. "Why did he come to your boat? The police are looking for him in the *hutungs*. Did he want you to help him escape on the river?"

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"He came for the small chest, Da-wei, the one he brought aboard when he hired my boat. He asked me if the police had been here. Before I could answer, his fist drove me into blackness."

David swore in three dialects and rushed out on deck. Little Orchid was sitting on the hatch cover. The bundle of pork rested untouched beside her leg. She was staring at the river and eating sugared plums from the paper in her lap. David knelt beside the small teakwood chest and opened the lid. The chest was empty.

"Eight-legged confusion!" He closed the lid and sat down beside the silent little girl absorbed in sugared plums and contemplation. She looked up and offered him a bite of plum. He shook his head. "Tell me about the man who came here today. Did you see him do anything?"

Little Orchid pointed to the empty chest. "I saw him take the sun from there and put it in his belly."

"Did he see you?"

"No, I was over there making a rice-bird."

"What did he do?"

"He went away," she replied.

"Where did he go?"

Little Orchid took the plum out of her mouth and pointed with it to the railing on the river side of the boat. David went to where she had pointed and looked over the side. A rope ladder hung down to a small skiff. The rope forming one side of the ladder was broken. David turned to her and asked, "Did he go away in a boat?"

Little Orchid threw back her head and squeaked with laughter. "You are such a silly funny man! No one needs a boat to travel to the River God!"

Charles Ketty was a happy man. "It was an excellent piece of work, Mr. Feng. Thanks to you—and to Captain Huang's grappling crew—I feel like a new man." His bony hands smoothed a wrinkle from the white tablecloth. "A superb meal, gentlemen. I believe it is time for dessert. Gordon, if you will be kind enough to hand me my briefcase there."

Gordon passed the briefcase across the table. "Speaking of dessert, Ling Fu certainly found his. A double helping all within an hour. First the River God marked him as a murderer and then drowned him—vest of gold and all."

Charles Ketty let his hands rest expectantly on the lid of the briefcase. He looked at David and said, "Gordon explained how you

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aged the appearance of your hands with a mixture of rice flour and mud. You must have given a stellar performance as the Summoner of Spirits." He opened the briefcase. From it he took six gold bars, which he arranged in front of him on the tablecloth. "I could have paid you your fee in American dollars, Mr. Feng, but I enjoy a bit of theater as much as you do."

He tapped one of the bars with his fingers. "There are six bars here as authorized by my company. I will gladly add another, Mr. Feng, if you will tell me by what magic you managed to place the white mark on the back of Ling Fu without being detected."

"By the magic of belief, Mr. Ketty. Sun Yat-sen freed China of the old Manchu rule, but older beliefs and superstitions will be a long time dying. The four men facing the wall in that darkened godown fully expected the River God to place his damning mark on the back of the murderer. Three of them knew they had nothing to fear in this matter. But not Ling Fu. A man foolish enough to spit at a shooting star is also foolish enough to try to outwit the gods. Ling Fu was just such a man.

"Once the doors of the godown were closed, this clever fellow turned around in the pitch-black darkness and placed his back firmly against the freshly whitewashed wall so that the River God would be forced to place the mark on his chest. Captain Huang cooperated with my plan. You know the results."

"Very ingenious, Mr. Feng, but what would have happened if your plan had failed at that point?"

David smiled and reached across the table. "Then at this point, Mr. Ketty, I would not be accepting the seventh bar."

"Q"

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

GOOD NEWS FOR GREENE FANS: Just a few months back, in my column of November 3rd, I was regretting the fact that a collected edition of Graham Greene's works was available in England but not in America. I'm pleased to report that Viking Press is beginning publication of a collected edition of Greene this month, and by 1983 will have reprinted all the books to which it owns the rights—generally everything published prior to 1971. The first three titles in the uniform hardcover edition are *Brighton Rock* (1938), *Our Man in Havana* (1958), and *Travels with My Aunt* (1969). I can think of no better introduction to Graham Greene than these three books, which admirably convey his many moods. *Brighton Rock* still contains, for me, one of the most memorable opening lines in crime fiction: "Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him."

HOLIDAY FROM CRIME: Few authors limit themselves solely to books in one field, and crime-suspense writers can often be found toiling on other projects. A recent example is John McAleer, regional vice-president of the New England chapter of Mystery Writers of America and MWA Edgar winner for his definitive biography of Rex Stout. Doubleday has just published his novel of the Korean War, *Unit Pride*, based upon the true experiences of an ex-convict McAleer knew.

And Evan Hunter, perhaps better known to mystery fans under his pseudonym of Ed McBain, has a moving novel of a father-daughter relationship, *Love, Dad,* on the April list from Crown Publishers. (Cheer up, McBain fans! He's also working on a new 87th Precinct novel, *Heat*, and a follow-up to his *Goldilocks* mystery titled *Rumpelstiltskin.*)

NEW BRITISH FANZINE: From England comes word of a new magazine for mystery fans. *Crime & Detective Fiction News* makes its first appearance in April with an issue devoted extensively to A. B. Cox, who wrote as "Anthony Berkeley" and "Francis Iles." In addition to articles about Cox, the magazine will reprint a virtually unknown short story, "The Burglaring Joke," and an article by him. A comprehensive Cox bibliography is included. In keeping with its subject matter the new mag-

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azine will be printed at a former police station in West Sussex. Subscriptions are $5.00 for two issues by air mail, and may be obtained from Paul R. Moy, 13 Keymer Road, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 8FB, England.

MIKE HAMMER RETURNS: Is this to be the year of a Mickey Spillane revival? Film producer Larry Cohen has announced plans to remake the first and most popular Mike Hammer novel, *I, the Jury,* originally filmed in 1953. And Spillane himself is writing the book for a new Broadway musical, *Oh, Mike!* It'll have music by Cy Coleman, using the jazz themes of the 1950s as a background for Hammer's new adventures.

NEW BOOKSTORE: Philadelphia readers will find a new mystery bookshop in their city. It's the Paper Dagger Bookstore, 1726 Sansom Street, and owner Andrew Litvin stocks both new and out-of-print books.

LOST MYSTERIES: Is it possible there exists an important book by a major mystery writer which has never had an unabridged American reprint since its original 1940 publication in a small trade edition? Yes—Carter Dickson's *The Department of Queer Complaints* is the book. Two American paperback editions in the early 1940s each omitted one or more of the eleven short stories, and the book has been out of print in America ever since, despite its appearance on *Queen's Quorum* and other important mystery lists. There hasn't even been a British reprint in nearly twenty years. Isn't it about time for Colonel March's reappearance?

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Despite its limited first printing designed mainly for libraries, the Garland Publishing series, *Fifty Classics of Crime Fiction 1900–1950,* edited by Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor, has proven remarkably influential since its publication five years ago. Many of the fifty volumes, long overlooked by editors, have now been reissued in paperback by various publishers. This spring Garland plans a second series of mystery classics chosen by Barzun and Taylor, covering the years 1950 to 1975. As with the first series, one volume will be devoted to short stories of the period. We'll have more information in a future column.

Following the successful six-part adaptation of John le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* on PBS television last fall, Sir Alec Guinness is currently filming its sequel, *Smiley's People,* in London. It'll be shown on British television next fall or winter, with an American viewing soon thereafter.

Joseph Wambaugh's new novel of the Los Angeles police, *Pleasure Dome,* will be out this spring under Morrow-Bantam's new Perigord Press imprint.

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P.S. We have just received news that the proposed *Crime & Detection Fiction News* will *not* be able to publish—with sincere regrets from its publisher.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Leaping lizards! More than a year before the show reached Broadway, just after its first experimental run at Connecticut's venerable Goodspeed Opera House, the stage musical *Annie* was reviewed by EQMN, especially for its melodrama content—the first national magazine to take notice of the play. Now, of course, the production has become one of the theater's greatest successes—with three touring companies and several foreign editions—due in no small part surely to the enduring qualities of its heroine, the ageless child waif whose carrot hair, red dress, wide undotted eyes, and faithful dog have symbolized undaunted courage and adventure since the comic strip began in 1924.

Little Orphan Annie was first thought of by its creator, cartoonist Harold Gray, as a boy named Otto, but the astute Captain Patterson of the Chicago Tribune syndicate felt a homeless little girl would wring more pathos. We meet the child first in a grim orphanage, from which she is plucked by a shrewish society woman for a few weeks' "holiday" so the woman can demonstrate her charitable doings to her friends. The matron's husband is a long-absent industrialist, Oliver Warbucks, and his surprise return initiates one of the most notable friendships in popular art. The gruff millionaire takes charge of the little girl, while the wife disappears from the strip forever (she has run off with European royalty). From the first, the story line championed the virtues of hard work, honesty, true friendship, the basic goodness of people, and the American work ethic—with increasingly stronger mystery themes added.

From the first, as well, "Daddy" Warbucks' source of wealth was never in doubt. Shortly after he meets Annie he confesses, "I had a little machine shop. Then the war came along. I was too old to fight but I wanted to do my bit so I made munitions. Well, I made a fortune, too, and everybody hates me for it." That hatred erupts in villainous dark doings, and soon the man is ruined and disappears, and the girl begins a long odyssey through America's heartlands, finding good people everywhere but no shortage of venality: crooked aldermen, rapacious bankers and politicians, crooks of every stripe, arson, stolen loot, gangs. Ultimately she is reunited with her adoptive father, who has recouped his fortune, lost it again, and become a dock hand, slowly working his way back to the financial heights until his imprisonment on false charges by a powerful criminal gang. He is finally pardoned, and personally destroys his enemies (with the permission of an uncorrupted state governor). Meantime, the drums of World War II bring him to even greater wealth and usher in the strip's most dramatic period.

"Of course all wars are wrong," Annie says in 1941. "We know that. If th' other guys could just re'lize it

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too, it'd be swell, eh?" Warbucks' gigantic factories are churning out the "tools of democracy," while the munitions king and his closest associates—his colorful, eight-foot, Middle Eastern bodyguard, Punjab, and silent Oriental assassin called the Asp—become generals in an unnamed army, "just a little ahead of things, Annie, but we're fighting the same enemies." Left to her own devices, Annie keeps busy: routing spies and saboteurs, and blowing up a U-boat near an American harbor just weeks before German subs were actually sighted off our coast. Soon Warbucks is reported dead again and Annie begins an endless post-war journey. The strip was vigorous until Gray's death in the late 1960s. No artist chosen by the syndicate to continue Annie's saga could capture her special style, and she declined. Then the musical revived interest in her fortunes.

(The stage *Annie* is pleasant, with interesting Dickensian workhouse scenes and plenty of crooked doings. "Daddy" Warbucks is especially fine, now portrayed on Broadway by John Schuck, who played the Leopold-derived character in a *McMillan and Wife* television reworking of one of Edward D. Hoch's Captain Leopold stories. But the musical radically changes Harold Gray's conservative political philosophy, in which the strip was liberally soaked. The show has Warbucks being bosom pals with President Roosevelt, singing and dancing about the "New Deal." The *real* Warbucks would have behaved somewhat differently had he ever found himself within arm's reach of FDR.)

Recently, because of the musical's new attention to the orphan, the syndicate handed the moribund strip to a great draftsman, Leonard Starr (who had previously drawn *On Stage*), and the magic returned. Once more the girl and her dog—have we neglected to mention Sandy's devotion?—wander across the pathways of melodrama. And it is rich melodrama. She follows Warbucks as he journeys to the Middle East to solve the oil crisis and he is felled by an enemy bullet. ("Daddy" dead? We refuse to believe it.) Living in the Washington household of a young senator, she is made aware of government corruption. She is also the target of organized crime, and unlike more timid current strips, people now *die* in *Annie*: a cop remarks coolly that a gangland victim was "shot in the back, and between the eyes as a warning." And currently she is fleeing gangsters in the company of a pleasant young man who is actually a homicidal maniac.

Today's Annie is stronger, more modern. She is easily spotted among the burnt-out teenage runaways midtown, because of her "clear eyes." But she still relates to that wide-eyed innocent of nearly sixty years ago, scrubbing orphanage floors and taking those first steps in a life of mystery and adventure and rich tomorrows.

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"Q"

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INTERVIEW: HUGH PENTECOST (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: You have been cited as a founding member of the Mystery Writers of America.

PENTECOST: I wasn't technically a founding member of MWA. There was a smoke-filled room somewhere inhabited by Baynard Kendrick, Ellery Queen, Ken Crossen, and others. I wasn't there but I was recruited early on. I believed in their slogan, "Crime does not pay—enough." I was, I believe, its third president and served a term as executive vice-president. Unfortunately, writers and artists aren't good candidates for unionlike activities. They're either too hungry to turn down a sale for reasons of principle or too successful to care about anyone else. But I'm proud of and have enjoyed my long association with MWA. Perhaps my proudest moment was when my peers voted me the Grand Master Award in 1973.

EQMN: But you did found The Sharon Playhouse in Connecticut?

PENTECOST: Yes, I founded The Sharon Playhouse, an Equity summer theater, in 1951—a hangover from my early stagestruck days, I suppose. I married the leading lady I hired for that first summer, Norma Burton, the most rewarding feature of that whole adventure. Both the theater, of which I am now just an elder statesman, and the marriage, in which I hope I have shown some statesmanship, are entering their thirtieth seasons.

EQMN: And you're also a longtime member of the Players Club?

PENTECOST: The Players is known as an actors' club. It was originally the home of Edwin Booth, America's greatest actor in the Nineteenth Century. Booth gave his home on Gramercy Park as a club for his fellow actors. He was a smart cookie, though. He guessed that actors would only talk about themselves and quickly bore themselves to death and suggested that writers, artists, musicians, and "men of the theater" would diversify the conversation. I got in as a writer.

EQMN: You have an interesting theory about success. Will you tell us about it?

PENTECOST: I've long had a theory that man employs the most extraordinary genius in putting obstacles in the way of achieving his main goals. Mine were to write the great American novel and a smash-hit Broadway play. My ingenuity in avoiding both these goals may someday make a book.

I can't resist a story. I was discussing this theory one day at The Players. The name of Lou Tellegan came up. He was an actor who came to this country in the late 'Teens as a leading man for Sarah Bernhardt, the Divine Sarah. He became a silent-movie star, married the famous opera singer, Geraldine Farrar, and seemed on the way to becoming a great figure in the theater. He committed suicide—"stabbed himself sixteen times with a pair of scissors," one of my friends said. I remember saying, "How on earth could a man stab himself sixteen times with a pair

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of scissors?" The late Dennis King looked over the top of the newspaper he was reading at the next table and answered in his crisp British voice. "Amateur night," he said.

I think the disease of amateurism in too many of us keeps us from risking failure at the main chance.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Should a series detective who has become closely associated with a certain locale be encouraged to travel? Sometimes it's a good idea, but more often not. Rex Stout's *Death of a Dude* (1969), for example, takes the customarily immobile Nero Wolfe to Montana, and the result is easily the worst Wolfe novel. Disaster is especially probable when European detectives make touristy visits to the U.S.A., as in Sara Woods' *The Knavish Crows* (1971), significantly one of the few Antony Maitland novels never published here. *Maigret in New York's Underworld* (1955) was the poorest Simenon novel I have ever read, so I approached another U.S.-based Maigret novel with trepidation. My fears were unjustified.

*** Georges Simenon: *Maigret at the Coroner's,* translated by Frances Keene, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $8.95. Continuing his American tour, Maigret lands in Arizona. The view of the Southwest and its people is fascinating, especially the contrast in sexual mores of late-'40s America and France. The crime and the inquest feel very real. Maigret is strictly an observer here, and the cross-cultural angle is more engaging than the plot. On balance, the Wild West Maigret is a dandy.

*** Tony Hillerman: *People of Darkness*, Harper and Row, $9.95. In another knowledgable view of the American Southwest, Hillerman introduces a new sleuth, Jim Chee of the Navajo Tribal Police. (Joe Leaphorn, of Hillerman's earlier books, is mentioned but does not appear.) It's a typically expert mix of crime and Indian lore featuring one of the most elaborate, unusual, and horrible murder methods in recent fiction.

*** Christian Garrison: *Snake Doctor*, Avon, $1.95. The Deep South, too, is receiving increasing attention from mystery writers. State capital cop Ace Chaney, apparently destined for series sleuth status, heads a story strong on style, people, and background. (Nomenclature problem: Early on, Chaney has a partner named Charlie and talks to a TV reporter named Casey. Such similarities in name are Chancey.)

*** A. D. Hutter: *The Death Mechanic*, Signet, $1.95. This very well written first novel by a psychoanalyst and English professor presents the case history of a sex killer in Berkeley, California. It's something of an inverted detective story with some scientific sleuthing à la Dr. Thorndyke by criminologist Stephen Woo and more mundane amateur detection by Welsh student Keith Clark. Suspense is the main attribute, though, in an auspicious debut.

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*** John Gardner: *The Last Trump*, McGraw-Hill, $11.95. In the early 1990s, the Russians have overrun Europe, and even Britain is under the Communist yoke. A British agent is sent from still-free America on a dangerous treasure hunt to save his nation and the world-as-we-know-it. Though a bit of a right-wing tract, the novel is unfailingly suspenseful—and Gardner has fun depicting present-day celebrities as old and decrepit only a few years down the line.

*** Simon Brett: *The Dead Side of the Mike*, Scribners, $8.95. Actor Charles Paris explores the initial-crazed world of B.B.C. radio in his sixth case. His satirical eye as sharp as ever, Brett pays homage to an earlier (1934) B.B.C. mystery, *Death at Broadcasting House* (American title: *London Calling*) by Val Gielgud and Holt Marvell.

*** Jonathan Valin: *Final Notice*, Dodd, Mead, $8.95. The second case of Cincinnati private eye Harry Stoner is more conventional than his first and reminds the reader too often of other stories—*Psycho*, "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," James Holding's Hal Johnson stories, and any novel you can name with a damsel-in-distress windup. It's basically a good job, however, and Valin is one of the genre's better new storytellers.

*** John Lutz: *Jericho Man*, Morrow, $10.95. Beginning with an intriguing premise—bombs planted in high-rise buildings during construction by a demolition expert permit New York to be held yet again for ransom—the story gradually loses credibility. Lutz is always readable, but he's not at his best here.

** Charles Merrill Smith: *Reverend Randollph and the Holy Terror*, Putnam, $10.95. Smith's real calling is as an informal essayist, not a novelist, and as usual he has more success with satirical and theological than detectival aspects. Smith's characters bounce back so readily, are so fast with a *bon mot* in times of crisis, that the terrors of the novel never seem real. (Paradox: I can list a dozen reasons why the Randollph novels are not good detective fiction, but I can never leave one unread.)

** Richard Forrest: *The Killing Edge*, Tower, $1.75. The thoroughly professional chronicler of Beatrice and Lyon Wentworth presents another male-female sleuthing team in garage owner L. C. (Laura) Converse and small-town Connecticut police chief Will Barnes. The product is pure whodunit with occasional sitcom overtones. Unfortunately, the murderer wears an "I done it" sign, and the plotting falls short of the Wentworth books' standard.

** Ron Goulart: *Skyrocket Steele*, Pocket Books, $2.25. Lovers of pulp magazines and movie serials will enjoy this amalgam of mystery, s.f., early forties nostalgia, and satire, especially the hilarious sixth chapter, in which the two hack screenwriters brainstorm the titular Flash Gordon ripoff.

Though some reviewers found it disappointing, I thought P. D. James's 1975 novel *The Black Tower*, set in a home for the disabled, was one of her very finest achievements. It is available along with the early novel *Unnatural Causes* (1967) and the universally admired *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972) in an omnibus volume, *Murder in Triplicate* (Scribners, $14.95), with a brief new foreword by the author.

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DEPARTMENT OF DISCOVERIES

THE AFFAIR OF THE RELUCTANT WITNESS

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

"The Affair of the Reluctant Witness" is a relatively unknown story by Erle Stanley Gardner. It raises the curtain on the stage of our Department of Discoveries in which we will bring you not only relatively unknown stories by well-known authors but also relatively unknown stories by relatively unknown writers—when the stories are little gems that somehow have been lost in forgotten or neglected archives.

(If you have a favorite story you haven't reread in years, or if there is a story that has persisted in your memory, please give us whatever details you can—author's name, title of story, where and when it originally appeared. We are happy to pay a modest finder's fee for all stories on which we are able to obtain reprint rights. Let us hear from you!)

Now, meet Jerry Bane, ex-prisoner of war, at present a ne'er-do-well man-about-town. But more important, Jerry Bane is a blood-brother—at least, a first cousin—of Erle Stanley Gardner's Lester Leith, and a member of the royal family that includes Edward D. Hoch's Nick Velvet and Leslie Charteris' Simon Templar (the Saint) and traces its larcenous lineage back to Robin Hood . . .

This Jerry Bane novelet, "The Affair of the Reluctant Witness," is not to be confused with Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason short story titled "The Case of the Irate Witness," which appeared in our issue of July 1954.

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Jerry Bane knuckled his eyes into wakefulness, kicked back the covers and said, "What time is it, Mugs?"

"Ten thirty," Mugs Magoo told him.

Bane jumped from the bed, stood in front of the open window, and went through a series of quick calisthenics.

Magoo surveyed the swift, lithe motions with eyes that had been trained to soak in details as a fresh blotting paper absorbs ink.

Jerry Bane straightened, extended his arms from the shoulder, and bending his knees, rapidly raised and lowered his body.

"How am I doing, Mugs?"

"Okay," Magoo said without enthusiasm. "I guess you just ain't the type that puts on weight. What's your waist?"

"Twenty-eight."

Mugs's comment was based on fifty years of cynical observation. "It's all right while you're young," he said, "and the girls are crazy about a good dancer, to be slim-waisted, but when you get up to what I call the competitive years, it takes beef to flatten out the opposition. When I was on the police force, the boys used to figure you needed weight to have impact. Not fat, you understand, but beef and bone."

"I understand," Bane said, smiling.

Mugs surveyed the empty sleeve of his right arm. "Of course," he added, "I've only got one punch now, but that one punch will do the work if I can get it in the right place and at the right time. What do you want for breakfast?"

"Poached eggs and coffee. What's the right time for the punch, Mugs?"

"First," Mugs said laconically.

Jerry chuckled.

"Better take your orange juice before you have your shower," Mugs advised, "and remember your friend, Arthur Arman Anson, is coming this morning."

Bane laughed. "Don't call that old fossil a friend. He's an attorney and the executor of my uncle's estate, that's all. He disapproves thoroughly of everything I do. . . . What's in the mail?"

"Did you order a package of photos from the Shooting Star News Photo Service?"

Bane nodded.

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Mugs cocked a quizzical eyebrow.

"It's an idea I had," Jerry said. "It's the answer to Anson, Mugs. The Shooting Star outfit has photographers who cover all the news events. Now, with your photographic memory, your knowledge of the underworld, the confidence men, the slickers and the hypocrites, it occurred to me it might be a good plan for us to study the news photographs. In other words, Mugs, we might build up a business, an unorthodox business to be sure, but a profitable business."

"And a dangerous business?" Mugs asked.

Jerry merely grinned.

"It's an expensive service?" Mugs asked dryly.

"A hundred bucks a month," Jerry said cheerfully. "Do you know, Mugs, Arthur Arman Anson had the colossal effrontery to tell me that since he's the trustee of a so-called spendthrift trust under my uncle's will he can withhold every penny of the trust fund if he sees fit.

"The ten thousand we got in a lump sum from my uncle's estate must be about gone. Anson is going to be difficult, so I thought we'd better do a little sharpshooting. He lives by his brains. We'll live by our wits."

"I see," Mugs said without expression.

"That ten grand *is* about gone, isn't it?" Jerry asked.

Mugs headed for the kitchenette. "I think I'd better look at the coffee."

"Okay," Bane said cheerfully.

He seated himself in front of the mirror, opened the package of photographs Mugs brought him, drank his orange juice, then connected the electric shaver.

Magoo said, "Anson is going to be here any minute now. Hope you don't mind my saying so, but he won't like it if he finds you still in pajamas. It irritates him."

"I know," Jerry said. "The old fossil thinks he has a right to order my life just because he's the executor of a spendthrift trust. How much money is left in the account, Mugs?"

Magoo cleared his throat. "I can't remember exactly," he said.

Bane disconnected the razor so that he could hear better. "Mugs, what the devil's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"*Phooey!* Let's have it."

"I'm sorry," Magoo blurted, "but you're overdrawn three hundred and eighty-seven dollars. The bank sent a notice."

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"I suppose the bank also advised Arthur Anson," Jerry said, "and he's coming up to pour reproaches over me and rub them in the open wounds."

"He'll relent and tide you over," Mugs said without conviction. "That's why your uncle made him trustee."

"Not Anson. That old petrified pretzel wants to run my life. If I'd do what he wants I'd become another Arthur Arman Anson, puttering around with a briefcase, a cavernous, bony face, lips as thin as a safety-razor blade, and about as sharp . . . Well, Mugs, I don't know what I'm going to do about salary, and today, I believe, is payday."

"You don't need to bother about salary," Magoo said feelingly. "When you picked me up I was selling pencils on the street."

"It isn't a question of what you *were* doing, but what you *are* doing," Jerry said. "Well, we'll finish with the whiskers, then the shower, then breakfast, then finances."

He resumed his shaving and as he did so started studying the pictures which had been sent out by the Shooting Star News Photo Service, photographs on eight-by-ten, with a hard, glossy finish, each photograph bearing a mimeographed warning to watch the credit line and a brief description of the picture so that news editors could make and run their own captions.

Jerry Bane tossed aside a picture of an automobile accident. "I guess the idea of this picture stuff wasn't so good, Mugs. It seems they're running around like mad, shooting auto accidents with all of the gruesome details."

"Part of a publicity campaign to educate the people," Mugs explained.

"Well, *those* photographs certainly don't interest me," Bane said. "Here, Mugs, you're the camera-eye man of the outfit. Run your eye through these pictures while I shower. I can't look at gruesome, mangled bodies and smashed-up automobiles on an empty stomach. See if you can't find the picture of some crook who's crashed into the news, someone you can tell me about. Then we may be able to figure out an angle."

Mugs said deprecatingly, "Of course, I'm an old-timer, Mr. Bane. There's a whole crop of newcomers in the crime field since I—"

"I know," Bane interrupted, laughing. "You're always apologizing, but the fact remains you have the old camera eye. That's where you got your nickname, Mugs, from being able to remember faces. They tell me you've never forgotten a face, a name, or a connection."

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"That was in the old days. I had both arms then and I was on the force and—"

"Yes, yes, I know," Jerry interrupted hastily, "and then you got mixed up in politics. Then you lost an arm, took to drink, and wound up selling pencils."

"There was an interval with a gentleman by the name of Mr. Pry," Mugs Magoo said somewhat wistfully. "He was a fast worker, that lad—reminds me of you. But I got to drinking too much and—"

"Well, you're on the wagon now," Bane said reassuringly. "You look over these pictures and see if you find anyone you know."

Still clad in pajamas, Bane seated himself at the breakfast table and said, "What about the photographs, Mugs?"

Magoo said, "A neat bit of cheesecake, sir. You might prefer this to the auto-accident pictures."

"Let's take a look."

Mugs Magoo passed over the picture of a girl in a bathing suit.

Bane looked at the picture, then read the caption underneath aloud:

"Federal Court proceedings were enlivened yesterday when, during a bathing-suit patent case, Stella Darling, nightclub entertainer, modeled the suit. 'Remove the garment and it will be introduced as plaintiff's Exhibit A,' said Judge Asa Lansing, then added hastily, 'Not here! Not here!' while the courtroom rocked with laughter."

Bane surveyed the photograph. "Some doll!"

Mugs nodded.

"Nice chassis."

Again Mugs nodded.

"But somehow the face doesn't go with the legs," Bane said. "It's a sad face, almost tragic. That expression could have been carved on a wooden mask."

Mugs Magoo said, "Nice kid when I first knew her. Won a beauty contest and was Miss Something-or-other in nineteen forty-three. Then things happened to her fast. She cashed in on what prosperity she could get, married a pretty good chap, then fell in love with another guy. Her husband caught her cheating, shot the other man, couldn't get by with the unwritten law, and went to jail. She came out west and turned up in the nightclubs. Nice figure, but gossip followed her from back east. Too bad the kid can't get a break and begin all over again. Gossip has long legs."

Bane nodded thoughtfully. "When you come right down to it,

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Mugs, there's not so much to differentiate her from a lot of the people who look down on her."

"Just a mere thirty minutes," Magoo said. "How's your coffee?"

"The coffee's fine. Why the thirty minutes, Mugs?"

"Her husband's train could have been late."

Bane grinned. "What else, Mugs? Anything else?"

"One here I don't get," Mugs said.

"What is it?"

Mugs handed him a photograph. It showed a young woman standing in a serve-yourself grocery store, pointing an accusing finger at a broad-shouldered man who, in turn, was pointing an accusing finger at the woman. At the woman's feet a dog lay sprawled. A pile of groceries on the counter by the cash register were evidently purchases made by the man.

"Why the double pointing?" Bane asked.

"Read it," Mugs said.

Bane read the story:

ACCUSER ACCUSED—In a strange double mix-up yesterday afternoon, Bernice Calhoun, 23, 9305 Sunset Way, accused William L. Gordon, 32, residing at a roominghouse at 505 Monadnock Drive, of having held up a jewelry shop known as the Jewel Casket, 9316 Sunset Way. When the suspect entered her Serve-Yourself Grocery Store, Miss Calhoun notified police, explaining she had seen Gordon, carrying a gun, backing out of the jewelry shop, forcing the proprietor, Harvey Haggard, to hold his hands high in the air. Then Gordon, alarmed by an approaching prowl car, entered the grocery store, apparently as a customer, picked up a shopping basket, and started selecting canned goods.

Police, answering Bernice Calhoun's call, rushed to the scene, only to encounter complications. Not only was no loot found on Gordon, but Harvey Haggard, casually reading a magazine in the Jewel Casket, said it was all news to him. So far as he knew, no one had staged a stickup. Gordon accused the woman of blackmail and is starting suit for defamation of character.

Bernice Calhoun, who is well liked in the neighborhood and who inherited the grocery store from her father, is frankly disturbed over her predicament. This photograph was taken just a few minutes after police arrived on the scene and shows Bernice Calhoun, right, accusing Gordon, left, who is, in turn, accusing Miss Calhoun. Gordon was taken into custody by police, pending an investigation.

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"Now that," Bane said, "is *something!* Know anything about it, Mugs?"

"This Gordon," Mugs said, placing a stubby finger on the picture of the man, "is a slick one. They call him 'Gopher' Gordon because he's always burrowing and working in the dark."

"You think it's a frame-up to shake Bernice Calhoun loose from some change?"

"More probably Gopher Gordon and Harvey Haggard are in it together and want to get the grocery-store lease."

"Seems a rather crude way of doing it," Bane said.

"Anything that works ain't crude," Mugs insisted doggedly.

"I wish you'd look into this, Mugs," Jerry Bane said thoughtfully. "It has possibilities. Here we are fresh out of cash, and this crook . . . and a beautiful woman . . . Check up on it, will you, Mugs?"

"You want me to do it now?"

"Right now," Jerry Bane said. "The way I look at it, haste is important. Get started."

Ten minutes after Mugs Magoo had left, Arthur Arman Anson knocked on the door.

His cold knuckles tapped with evenly spaced decision.

Jerry Bane let him in.

"Hello, Counselor," he said. "I've just finished breakfast. How about having a cup of coffee?"

"No, thank you. I breakfasted at six thirty."

"You look it," Bane said.

"How's that?"

"I said you looked it. You know, early to bed, early to rise, and all that sort of stuff."

Anson settled himself with severe austerity in a straight-backed chair, depositing his briefcase beside him.

"I come in the performance of a necessary but disagreeable duty," Anson said, his voice showing that he relished his errand, despite his remarks.

"Go right ahead with the lecture," Jerry Bane said.

"It's not a lecture, young man. I am merely making a few remarks."

"Go ahead and make them, then, but remember the adjective."

"You are living the life of a wastrel. By this time you should have recovered from the harrowing experiences of the Japanese prison

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camp. You should have recovered from the effects of your two years of malnutrition. In other words, young man, you should go to work."

"What do you suggest?" Jerry asked.

"Hard manual labor," Anson said grimly.

"I don't get it."

"That is the way *I* got *my* start. I worked with pick and shovel on railroad construction and—"

"And then inherited money, I believe," Jerry said.

"That has nothing to do with it, young man. I began at the bottom and have worked my way to the top. You are wasting your time in frivolity. I don't suppose you go to bed before eleven or twelve o'clock at night! I find you at this hour of the morning still lounging around in pajamas.

"Furthermore, I find you associating with a disreputable character, a one-armed consort of the underworld, who has sold pencils on the streets of this city."

"He's loyal and I like him," Jerry said.

"He's a dissipated has-been," Anson snapped. "Your uncle left you ten thousand dollars outright. The bulk of his estate, however, he left to me as trustee. I am empowered to give you as much or as little of that money as I see fit, the idea being that—"

"Yes, yes, I know," Jerry interrupted. "My uncle thought I might spend it all in one wild fling. He wanted you to see that it was passed out to me in installments. All right, I'm broke right now. Pass out an installment."

"I do not know what your uncle wanted," Anson said, "but I do know what I intend to do."

"What's that?"

"You have squandered the ten thousand dollars. Look at this apartment, equipped with vacuum cleaners, electric dishwashers, all sorts of gadgets—"

"Because my man has only one arm, and I'm trying to—"

"Exactly. Because of your sentiment for this sodden hulk of the streets, you have dissipated your cash inheritance. Young man, the bank advises me you are overdrawn. Now then, I'm going to give it to you straight. Get out of this apartment. Go to a roominghouse somewhere and start living within your means. Strip off those tailored clothes, get into overalls, start doing hard manual labor. At the end of six months I will again discuss the matter with you . . . Do you know how much you have spent in the last three months?"

"I never was much good at addition," Jerry confessed.

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"Try subtraction then!" Anson snapped.

Bane's face was reproachful. "Just when I was about to steer a lawsuit to your office—a spectacular case you're bound to win."

Anson's shrewd eyes showed a brief flicker of interest. "What's the case?"

"I can't tell you now."

"Bosh. Probably something I wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. And in any event, my decision would remain unaltered."

"A beautiful case," Bane went on. "A case involving defamation of character. The young woman defendant is entirely innocent. You'll have an opportunity to walk into court and make one of those spectacular, last-minute exposés of the other side. A case that has everything."

"Who is this client?"

"A raving, roaring beauty."

"I don't want them to rave. I don't want them to roar. I want them to pay," Anson said, and then added, "And I don't care whether they're beautiful or not."

Bane grinned. "But think of it, Anson. All this, and beauty too."

"Don't think you can bribe me, young man. I have been an attorney too long to fall for these blandishments, these nebulous fees which never materialize, these mysterious clients with their marvelous cases who somehow never quite get to the office. You have my ultimatum. I'll thank you to advise me within forty-eight hours that you have gone to work. Hard manual labor. At the end of what I consider a proper period I will then give you a chance to get a so-called white-collar job. Good day, sir."

"And you won't have a cup of coffee?"

"Definitely not. I never eat between meals."

Arthur Arman Anson slammed the door behind him.

Mugs Magoo found Jerry Bane sprawled out in the big easy chair, his mind completely absorbed in a book entitled *The Mathematics of Business Management.* Beside him on the smoking stand was a slide rule with which Bane had been checking the conclusions of the author.

Magoo stood by the chair for some two or three minutes before Bane, feeling his presence, fidgeted uneasily for a moment, then looked up. "I didn't want to interrupt you," Mugs said, "but I have a very interesting story."

"You talked with her?"

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"Yes."

"Is she really as good-looking as the newspaper picture made her out to be?"

Mugs took a photograph from an envelope. "Better. This was taken last summer at a beach resort."

Jerry Bane carefully studied the picture, then gave a low whistle.

"Exactly," Mugs Magoo said dryly.

"Now how the devil did you get this, Mugs?"

"Well, I found that the store's about all she has in the world and she's pretty hard up for cash. I told her some of the big wholesalers were going to put on a campaign to feature neighborhood grocery stores and they wanted to get pictures that would catch the eye. I told her that if she had an attractive picture of herself, one that would look well in print, she might win a prize, and that if she did, a man would come to photograph the store and pay her a hundred and fifty dollars for the right to publish her picture; that if the picture wasn't used, she'd get it back and wouldn't be out anything."

Jerry Bane studied the picture. "Plenty of this and that and these and those. Lots of oomph, Mugs."

"Plenty, sir."

"And she's hard up for cash?"

"Apparently so. She wants to sell the store, but she's worried about what may happen on this defamation-of-character suit."

"What's new in that case, Mugs?"

"Well, she's beginning to think she may have acted a little hastily. She isn't *certain* she saw the gun. She saw the man throw something over the fence, but the police haven't been able to find anything. Frankly, sir, I think she's beginning to feel she was mistaken . . . But she wasn't."

"She wasn't?"

Mugs Magoo shook his head. "I got a look at this man, Haggard, who runs that jewelry store. I know some stuff about him the police don't."

"What?"

"He's a fence, and he's clever as hell. He buys stuff here and ships it by air express to retail outlets all over the country."

"An association of fences?"

Mugs nodded and said, "You can figure out what happened. This man Gordon had probably had some dealings with Haggard and had been given a double-cross. He decided to get even in his own way."

Bane nodded thoughtfully. "So, naturally, Haggard can't admit

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anything was taken because he doesn't dare describe the loot . . . Let me take a look at that picture again, Mugs."

Mugs handed him the photograph of the girl in the bathing suit.

"Not that one," Jerry Bane said. "The one that shows her accusing Gopher Gordon, and Gopher Gordon accusing her. Do you know, Mugs, I'm beginning to get a very definite idea that may pay off."

"I thought you might," Magoo said. "A man can look at a picture of a jane like that and get ideas pretty fast."

The girl looked up from the cash register as Jerry entered the store.

Jerry noticed that she had a nice complexion and good lines, because he was something of an expert in such matters. Her long slender legs had just the right curves in keeping with her streamlined figure. Moreover, there was a certain alertness in her eyes, a mischievous, provocative something which held a definite challenge.

Jerry Bane, apparently completely preoccupied with his errand, picked up a market basket and walked around looking at the canned goods.

The girl tossed her head and returned to an inspection of the accounts on which she had been working when Jerry entered. This slack time of the afternoon was a period which she apparently set aside for her bookkeeping.

Left to his own devices, Jerry carefully selected a can of grapefruit and a package of rolled oats. He glanced back toward the cans of dog food on the counter where the girl bent over her work beside the cash register—the cans which had shown up so plainly in the news photo. Then he looked at his watch. Very soon—almost at once, in fact, if Mugs Magoo was on the beam—the telephone would ring and Bernice Calhoun would leave the counter to answer it. If Mugs could keep her there for a minute or two, there would be time enough for . . .

The phone shrilled. The girl looked up. Her eyes rested briefly on Jerry, then she shut the cash-register drawer and walked swiftly to the back of the store, where the telephone hung on the wall in a corner.

Jerry stepped in front of the pyramided cans of dog food. They were arranged so that the labels were toward the front—except for one can. He deftly extracted this can from the pile.

The lid had been entirely removed by a can opener which had

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made a smooth job of cutting around the top of the can. The interior contained bits of dried dog food still adhering to the tin, but, in addition to that, there was a flash of scintillating brilliance, light shafts from sparkling gems which showed ruby red, emerald green, and the indescribable glitter of diamonds.

Jerry's body shielded what he was doing from the girl. His hand, moving swiftly, dumped the contents of the can into an inside coat pocket, a coruscating cascade of unset jewels which rattled reassuringly.

From another pocket in his coat he took some cheap imitation jewels which he had removed from costume jewelry. When he had the can two-thirds full, he took some of the genuine stones and placed them on top in a layer of brilliant temptation.

He replaced the can, being careful to leave it just as he had found it, then wandered over to the shelf where the jams were displayed. As he picked up a jar of marmalade, he heard the girl's footsteps clicking back to the counter. He took his basket of groceries to her.

She seemed now to have definitely decided on an impersonal course of conduct.

"Good afternoon," she said politely, and jabbed at the keys of the cash register. "Two dollars and sixteen cents," she announced.

Jerry gravely handed her a five-dollar bill. She rang up the sale on the cash register.

"Too bad about your lawsuit," Jerry said. "I have an idea I can help you."

She was engaged in making change, but stopped and glanced up at him swiftly. "What's *your* game?" she asked.

"No game. I only thought I might be of some assistance."

"In what way?"

"I have a friend who is a very able lawyer."

"Oh, *that!*" She shrugged contemptuously.

"And, if I spoke to him, I'm quite sure he'd handle your case for a nominal fee."

She laughed scornfully. "I know, just because I have an honest face—or is it the figure?"

Jerry Bane said, "Perhaps I'd better explain myself. I have reason to believe you're being victimized."

"Indeed," she said, her voice as cutting as a cold wind on a wintry evening. "Your perspicacity surprises me, Mr.—er—"

"Mr. Bane," he said. "Jerry to my friends."

"Oh, yes, *Mister* Bane!"

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"While you probably don't realize it," Jerry went on, "the man whom you identified as the stickup artist is known to the police of the northern cities. He doesn't have a criminal record in the sense that his fingerprints have ever been taken, and no one knows him here, but the police in the north know a little about him."

"Wouldn't that be valuable in—well, you know, in the event he sues me for defamation of character?" she asked, her voice suddenly friendly.

"It would be more than valuable. It would be priceless."

"You have proof?"

"I think I can get proof."

She slowly closed the drawer of the cash register. "Exactly what is it you want?" she asked.

Jerry made a little gesture of dismissal. "Merely an opportunity to be of service. Try me out."

"If I do, I'll hold you to your promise."

"I'd expect you to."

"What do you want me to do?"

"First, tell me exactly what happened—everything."

She studied him thoughtfully, then said abruptly, "Ever since my father died, I've been trying to make a go of this place. It won't warrant paying the salary of a clerk. It's a small place. I have to do the work myself.

"I keep track of the stock. I make up orders. I keep books. I open shipments, arrange the stock on the shelves, and do all sorts of odd jobs. I work here at night and early in the morning. During the daytime I fill in the time between customers with clerical work on the books.

"Day before yesterday I happened to be looking out of that window. From this position you can look right across to that little jewelry shop known as the Jewel Casket.

"I don't know much about that place. Now that I think of it, I don't know how a person could expect to make a living with a jewelry store in that location, but Mr. Haggard evidently does all right. Of course, he doesn't have a high rent to pay.

"Well, anyway, as I was looking out of the window, I saw this man's back and I felt certain he was holding a gun. I thought I could see someone in the store holding his hands up. Then this man, Gordon, came out into the street, and I'm almost positive he tossed something over the board fence into that vacant lot.

"Then I saw him stiffen with apprehension and he seemed to be

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ready to run. I couldn't see what had frightened him at the moment, but I could see he was looking over his left shoulder, up the street."

"Go on," Jerry said.

"Well, he didn't run. He hurried across the street over here. Just as he came in the door, I saw what it was that had frightened him."

"What was it?"

"A police prowl car. It came cruising by, going slowly, the red spotlight on the windshield and the radio antennae showing plainly it was a police car. I was frightened, simply scared stiff."

"You have a dog here?" Bane asked.

"Yes, but he's a good-natured, friendly dog. He would be no protection unless, perhaps, someone should attack me."

"What did this man do after he got inside here?"

"Walked around the store and tried to act like a customer, picking out canned goods to put in a basket, but picking them out carefully and with such attention to the labels that I knew he was simply stalling.

"I guess I was in such a panic that I didn't stop to think—I just don't know. At the time I really felt he was a stickup man. Now I'm not so sure. Anyhow, I went to the phone and got police headquarters. The phone's so far back in the store," she explained, "that he couldn't hear me from where he was."

Jerry nodded. "Not very convenient to have it so far away. Usually, I mean—for orders and that sort of thing."

"I don't take phone orders," she said. "That's what I kept trying to tell that guy that called just now. But he couldn't seem to understand. Maybe because he was English. You know, very lah-de-dah kind of voice."

Jerry grinned. Mugs and his imitation of Jeeves! He'd do it at the drop of a hat.

"So you called the police," he prompted the girl.

"Yes. I told them who I was, explained that a man had just held up the jewelry store across the street, had been frightened by a police radio car, and had taken refuge in my store. I knew that the police department could get in touch with the radio car right away and I suggested they have the driver turn around and come back here."

"And that was done?"

"Yes. It took them about—oh, I'd say a few minutes."

"And what happened when the police arrived?"

"The car pulled up in front of the store. The officers jumped out

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with drawn guns, and I pointed out this man to them and accused him of having held up the store across the street.

"At that time the man had finished buying his groceries and was standing here at the cash register. I'd been fumbling around a bit making his change, so that the radio car would have time to get back.

"This man said his name was Gordon and that I was crazy, that he'd stopped to look in the window of the Jewel Casket, had started to go in to buy a present for his girl friend, and then changed his mind and decided to buy some groceries instead. He said that he'd never carried a gun in his life. The police searched him and found nothing. I told them to go over to the Jewel Casket. I thought perhaps they'd find Mr. Haggard dead."

"What happened?"

"That's the part I simply can't understand. Mr. Haggard was there in the store and he said that no one had been in during the last fifteen minutes and that he hadn't been held up. I—I felt like a complete ninny."

"Would you gamble a little of your time and do *exactly* what I say if it would get you out of this mess?" Bane asked.

"What do you want?"

"I want you to close up the store and come with me to see my lawyer, Arthur Anson. I want you to tell him your story. After that I want you to promise me that, in case he should return to the store with you, you'll stay right beside him all the time he's here."

"Why that?" she asked.

Jerry grinned. "It's just a hunch. Do *just* as I tell you and you may get this cleaned up."

She thought that over for several seconds, then said, "Oh, well, what have I got to lose?"

"Exactly," Jerry said, and his smile was like spring sunshine.

Arthur Arman Anson was cold as a wet towel.

"Jerry, I'm a busy man. I have no time to listen to your wheedling. I will not give you—"

"I told your secretary that I have a client waiting," Jerry Bane interrupted.

"I recognize the typical approach," Anson said. "I not only fear the Greeks when they bear gifts, but I shall not change my decision in your case by so much as a single, solitary penny! Kindly remember that."

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Jerry Bane whipped the bathing-suit photograph out of his briefcase. "This is a picture of the client."

Arthur Anson adjusted his glasses and peered through the lower segments of his bifocals. He *harrumphed* importantly.

Jerry Bane whipped out the other photograph, the one taken by the Shooting Star photographer, and said, "Take a look at *that* picture. Study the caption."

Arthur Anson looked at the photograph, read the caption, and once more cleared his throat.

"Interesting," he said noncommittally, then added after a moment, "Very."

"Now then," Jerry Bane went on, "this man, Mugs Magoo, who works for me—"

"A thoroughly disreputable character," Anson interrupted.

"—has a camera eye and a great memory," Bane went on as though the interruption had not been made. "As soon as he looked at this picture he recognized this man as a crook."

"Indeed!"

"He's known as Gopher Gordon because he works underground and by such devious methods the police have never been able to get anything on him. This is the first time he's actually been held for anything and the first time he's ever been fingerprinted. That's why he's so furious at Bernice, and so determined to sue her."

Anson stroked the long angle of his jaw with the tips of bony fingers. "A bad reputation is a very difficult thing to prove. People don't want to get on the witness stand and testify. However, of course, if this young woman insists on consulting me, and if she has sufficient funds to pay me an ample retainer as well as to hire competent detectives—"

"She isn't going to pay you a cent," Jerry Bane said.

Sheer surprise jerked Arthur Anson out of his professional calm. "What's that?"

"She isn't going to pay you a cent."

Anson pushed back the photographs. "Then get her out of my office," he stormed. "Damn it, Bane, I—"

"But," Jerry interrupted, "you're going to make a lot of money out of the case just the same, because you're going to get such a spectacular courtroom victory it'll give you an enormous amount of advertising."

"I don't need advertising."

"A man can't get too much of it," Jerry said, talking rapidly. "Now,

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look what happened. This man Haggard says he *wasn't* held up. Bernice knows that he was. He's lying. You can tear into him on cross-examination and—"

"And prove my client is a liar."

"I tell you she isn't a liar. She's a sweet young girl who is being victimized."

Anson shook his head decisively. "If this jewelry store man says he wasn't held up, that finishes it. This young woman is a blackmailer and a liar. Get her out of my office."

Jerry Bane said desperately, "I wish you'd listen to me. These men are both crooks."

"Both?"

"Yes, both. They have to be."

"Indeed," Anson said with elaborate irony. "Simply because these men tell a story which fails to coincide with that told by a young woman with whom you have apparently become infatuated—"

"Don't you see?" Jerry interrupted once more. "Haggard is running a jewelry store out there in a neighborhood where the volume would be too small to support his overhead unless the store were a mask for some illegitimate activity. Out there he poses as a small operator, selling cheap jewelry to a family trade, costume jewelry to schoolgirls, fountain pens, cigarette lighters, various knick-knacks. Actually he has a more profitable activity. He's a fence.

"Being out in that district of small neighborhood stores, he's in a position to keep irregular hours. No one thinks anything of it when he comes down at night and putters around in his store, because many of the storekeepers who can't afford help do the same thing. So Haggard uses this fact as a shield for an illicit business.

"This man Gordon is a crook. Gordon knew what Haggard's business was. He undoubtedly knew that some very large haul of stones had been purchased by Haggard, and Gordon saw a chance to step in and clean up. He knew that Haggard wouldn't be in a position to report his loss to the police. Gordon was personally unknown to Haggard, just as he is unknown to the police here. He hoped that no one who had known him in the north would catch up with him and identify him.

"An ordinary crook, established here in this city, wouldn't have dared to hold up a fence. The underworld has its own way of meting out punishment. But Gordon was an outsider, a slick worker, a man who could step in, make a stickup, and then get out. He's noted for that."

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"And what did he do with the loot?" Anson asked sarcastically. "Remember, the police searched him."

"Sure, the police searched him. But he'd been in that grocery store for some five minutes before they searched him, and he saw the young woman go over to the telephone and start talking in a low tone of voice. He wasn't so dumb but what he knew that he was trapped. His only chance was to get rid of the jewelry."

"Where did he put it?"

"It's concealed in various places around the store . . . Why, look here!" Jerry said in sudden excitement, as though the idea had just occurred to him. "What would have prevented him from opening a can, dumping out the contents, and putting the jewelry in the empty can?"

"Ah, yes," Anson said, his voice a cold sneer. "The typical reasoning of a fat-brained, young spendthrift. I suppose he opened a can of peaches, dumped the peaches on the floor, and then put the jewelry in the can. The police searched the place and couldn't find anything wrong. They never noticed the dripping can or the peaches on the floor. Oh, no!"

"Well," Bane said, "it wouldn't have to be a can of peaches. And he could have opened a can so neatly that . . . Why, suppose he'd opened a can of dog food and put *that* on the floor! The dog would promptly have gulped it up and . . . Say, wait a minute—"

Jerry broke off to look at the photograph with eyes that were suddenly wide with surprise, as though he were just noticing something he hadn't seen before. "Look right here!" he said. "There's canned dog food piled on the counter. And—yes—here's one can that's turned around, turned the wrong way so the brand name doesn't show."

Anson was now studying the photograph too. Jerry pointed to the pile of groceries on the counter. "And look at what he has there—a can opener! That settles it. He picked up the can opener—I saw a box of them by the canned-fruit shelves when I was there—and he used it on the can of dog food. Probably while the girl was at the back of the store phoning the police. It—"

Anson snatched the photographs out of Jerry Bane's hand and popped them into a drawer in his desk. "Young man," he said, "your reasoning is asinine, puerile, sophomoric, and absurd. However, you have brought a young woman to my office, a young woman who is in a legal predicament. I will, at least, talk with her. I will not judge her entirely on the strength of what you say."

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"Very well, I'll call her in," Jerry said, his voice without expression.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, young man. I do not discuss business with clients in the presence of an outsider. You have brought this woman to my office. I will talk with her and I will talk with her privately. I'll excuse you now, Mr. Bane—and naturally I'll expect you to keep this entire matter entirely confidential."

"Any need for secrecy?"

"It's *not* secrecy. It's merely preserving the legal integrity of my office. Good afternoon, young man."

"Good afternoon," Jerry said.

Jerry Bane found Stella Darling waiting impatiently.

"Your phone call said you had a modeling job," she said. "I've been waiting here for over an hour."

"Sorry, I was a little late," Jerry said. "I was making arrangements with my clients."

"What sort of a modeling job is it?"

"Well," Jerry said, "to be frank with you, Miss Darling, it's just a bit out of the ordinary. It's—"

Her voice cut across his like a knife. "Nude?" she asked.

"No, no. Nothing like that."

"How did you find out about me?" she asked.

"I saw the photograph of you modeling the bathing suit in court."

"I see." Her voice indicated that she saw a great deal. Her appraisal of Jerry Bane was personal and, after a moment, approving.

Jerry said, "This job is one I'd like to have you carry out to the letter. I have here a sheet of typewritten instructions, telling you just what to do."

She said, "Look, Mr. Bane, I have a lot of things put up to me. I'm trying to make a living. I have a beautiful body. I'm trying to capitalize on it while it lasts. I made the mistake of winning a beauty contest once and thought I was going to become a movie star overnight. I quit school and started signing up with this and that . . . Lord, what I wouldn't give to turn back the hands of the clock and be back in school once more!"

"Perhaps," Jerry said, "if you do *exactly* as I say, you'll have an opportunity to do that. I'm trying a unique exploitation of a brand-new dog food. If things go the way I want, I may be able to sell out the brand and the good will, lock, stock, and barrel.

"However, I haven't time to discuss details now. Here's some

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money to cover your regular hourly rate. If you do a good job, you'll receive a substantial bonus tomorrow. Now then, get busy."

"And I wear street clothes?"

"Street clothes," Jerry Bane said. "Just what you have on."

She sized him up, then said, "The modeling I have been doing has been—well, it's been a little bit of everything. You don't need to be afraid to tell me what it is. You don't need to write it out for me. Just go ahead and tell me."

Jerry Bane smiled and shook his head. "Read these typewritten instructions," he said. "Follow them to the letter and get started."

She took the typewritten sheet from him, once more gave him a glance from under long-lashed eyelids. "Okay," she said, "I'll do it your way."

"You'll have to go out on Sunset Way," he said. "You can read your instructions on the way out."

Jerry Bane found Mugs Magoo seated in the kitchen of the apartment, holding a newspaper propped up with one arm.

"Mugs," he said, "what would you do if you suddenly found yourself in possession of a lot of stolen jewelry?"

"That depends," Mugs said, looking up from the paper and regarding Jerry Bane with expressionless eyes.

"Depends on what?"

"On whether you wanted to be real smart or only half smart."

"I'd want to be *real* smart, Mugs."

"The point is," Mugs went on, "that if the jewelry is real hot, you'd have to fence it to sell it. If it was stuff that had cooled off a bit, it would be a great temptation to try passing off a little here and there. Either way would be half smart."

"And to be *real* smart, Mugs?"

"You'd get in touch with the insurance companies. You'd suggest to them that you *might* be able to help them make restorations here and there but you'd want it handled in such a way that you collected a reward."

"Would they pay?"

"If you make the right approach."

"How much?"

"If they thought they were dealing with a crook who was a squealer, they wouldn't pay very much. If they thought they were dealing with a reputable detective who had made a recovery, they'd come through handsomely."

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Bane reached in his pocket, took out a knotted handkerchief, untied the knots, and let Magoo's eyes feast on the assorted collection of sparklers.

"Gosh!" Mugs Magoo said.

"I want to be *real* smart, Mugs."

"Okay," Mugs said, scooping up the handkerchief in his big hand. "I guess I know the angles . . . Somebody going to miss this stuff?"

"I'm afraid so," Jerry Bane said, "but I think I juggled the inventory. Someone else may get part of it, Mugs. A selfish, greedy someone who may be only *half* smart."

Magoo regarded his friend with eyes that were cold with cynicism. "If this is what I think it is, this other guy will find the underworld can stick together like two pieces of flypaper. If he tries to chisel, he might even wind up pushing up daisies."

Jerry said, "Of course, if he's *really* honest, he'll report to the cops."

"Do you think he will be?"

"No."

"Okay," Mugs said. "Let him lead with *his* chin. We'll work undercover."

Jerry Bane was stretched out in the easy chair, a highball glass at his elbow, when timid knuckles tapped on the door of the apartment.

Mugs Magoo opened the door.

Bernice Calhoun said, "Oh, good evening. I *do* hope Mr. Bane is home. I have to see him. I—why, you're the man who—"

"He's home," Mugs Magoo said. "Come in."

Jerry Bane was getting to his feet as she entered the room. She ran to him and gave him both her hands. "Mr. Bane," she said, "the most *wonderful* thing has happened! I simply can't understand it."

"Sit down and tell me about it," Jerry said. "What do you want—Scotch or bourbon?"

"Scotch and soda."

Jerry nodded to Mugs Magoo, then said, "All right, Bernice, what happened?"

She said, "I didn't like the lawyer you took me to. He was very gruff. He asked a lot of questions and then said he'd go down to the grocery store and look the place over, but he didn't think he'd be particularly interested in the case. He didn't seem at all eager, not even cordial."

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"And what happened?"

She said, "Well, after he'd asked a lot of questions, he went down to the store with me. I opened up and showed him just where I had been standing and all that. Then he looked around and asked a few questions and looked the shelves over, and I remembered what you'd told me and I tagged right along with him, and that seemed to irritate him. He made several attempts to get rid of me, but I stayed right beside him."

"Then what?" Jerry asked.

"Then a young woman came in. She was a very theatrical young woman with lots of makeup. She said rather loudly that she had been having a hard time getting the brand of dog food her dog wanted and that she noticed I had a stock of that brand. She asked me if she could buy my entire stock and if I'd take her check. She said her name was Stella Darling."

"Then what happened?" Jerry asked.

"The *strangest* thing," she said. "This lawyer advised me to take no one's personal check, and he went back to the telephone and called his office."

"Go on," Jerry said.

"Well, it seemed that while he was telephoning, a client was in his office. This client had been looking for some small business that he could go into, something that he could operate on a one-man basis. I'd been telling Mr. Anson that I'd really like to sell out that grocery-store business, and—well, one thing led to another, and Mr. Anson negotiated over the telephone, and I sold the business right there."

"What did you do about an inventory?" Jerry flashed a glance at Mugs Magoo.

"Mr. Anson gave me his check, based on my own figures, and took immediate possession."

"And this Miss Darling who wanted to buy the dog food? Did the lawyer sell it to her?"

"Indeed, he did not. He literally put her out of the store, took the keys, and locked up." There was a moment of silence.

"And so," she said, "I—I wanted to thank you—personally."

The telephone rang and Jerry picked it up.

Arthur Arman Anson's voice came over the wire. "Jerry, my boy, I've been doing a little thinking. After all, you're young, and I suppose the war rather upset your whole life. I think a man must make allowances for youth."

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"Thank you."

"I've covered the overdraft at your bank and deposited a few hundred dollars, Jerry, my boy. But try to be a little more careful with money."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, I will."

"And, Jerry, in case you should see Miss Calhoun, the young woman who had the grocery store, be very careful not to mention anything about that perfectly cockeyed theory you had. There was absolutely nothing to it."

"There wasn't?"

"No, my boy. I went down there and looked the place over. I inspected the can which the photograph shows was partially turned. It was just the same as any other can—nothing in it but dog food. However, it happened a client of mine was interested in a property such as Miss Calhoun has there and I was able to arrange a sale for her."

"Oh, that's splendid!" Jerry said.

"Purely a matter of business," Anson observed. "I was glad it worked out the way it did, because this young woman is very vulnerable to a lawsuit. She'd better get out of the state before papers can be served. As an ethical lawyer, I didn't want to tell her to do that, but in case you should see her, *you* can tell her to get out of the state at once. Get me?"

"Meaning I haven't your high ethics to handicap me?" Jerry asked.

"Very few men could live up to my ethics," Anson declared.

"Yes, I presume so. Very well, I'll tell her."

"Well, I won't keep you up any longer," Anson said.

"Keep me up!" Jerry laughed. "Is it by any chance bedtime?"

"Well, it's after ten o'clock," Arthur Anson said. "Good night, Jerry."

"Good night."

Jerry hung up the phone and turned to Bernice Calhoun. "Under the circumstances," he said, "don't you think we should do some dinner dancing?"

"Well," she told him demurely, "I came to thank you—"

Mugs said, "Did you by any chance hear the news on the radio?"

Jerry Bane looked up quickly. "Should I?"

"I think you should have."

"What was it?"

Mugs glanced at Bernice Calhoun.

"Go ahead," Jerry said. "She'll learn about it sooner or later."

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"This man Gordon she had arrested," Mugs said, "was released from jail. He was being held on investigation and he dug up some bail. He was released about an hour ago."

"Indeed," Jerry said.

"And," Mugs went on, "the police are somewhat mystified. A witness told them that as Gordon walked down the jail steps, a car was waiting for him and a man said, 'Get in.' Gordon acted as though he didn't want to get in. He hesitated, but finally got in the car. The witness felt certain a man in the back seat was holding a gun on Gordon. He was so certain of it that he went to the police to report, but there wasn't much the police could do about it. The license number on the automobile was spotted with mud and the man hadn't been able to get it."

"Oh," Bernice said, "then that man must have been connected with the underworld after all! Why do you suppose they wanted him to—to go for a ride?"

"Probably," Mugs Magoo said, "they wanted to get some information out of him. And with all night at their disposal, they'll quite probably get the information they want."

His eyes were significant as he looked steadily at Jerry Bane.

Bane stretched his arms and yawned. "Oh, well," he said, "tomorrow's a new day for all of us, and my friend, Arthur Anson, has bought Bernice's grocery store."

Bernice said, "I'm *so* relieved. The lawyer promised me that, as part of the deal on the store, he'd see that I was indemnified in case this man started a suit against me. Now that I've sold the store, I feel I haven't any responsibilities."

"That's just the way with me," Jerry Bane said. "Not a care in the world! Let's go dance, Bernice."

"Q"

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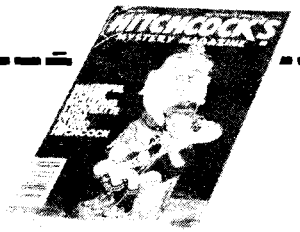

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a *NEW* detective story by

CHRISTIANNA BRAND

Constable Bill Evans saw the whole thing clearly—saw Jellinks run down and kill Evans' own daughter and grandchild. He could have put the blame on Jellinks, an unpopular ex-con. But Evans was an honest witness. He had "to do what's right." He had to tell the truth. It was not Jellinks' fault . . .

THE HAND OF GOD

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

They could scarcely believe their ears. "He was driving quite *slow?"*

"Well, not fast, Sergeant. I can't say that. And a country road, very little traffic—"

"Constable Evans—Jellinks here, he says himself that he was driving fast."

"Not all that fast," said Jellinks quickly.

"He's confused," said Constable Bill Evans. "Shocked, I daresay, doesn't know what he's saying." Natural enough, he added, his big, strong, middle-aged face gone so white and pudgy now in the evening light. Jellinks having just run down—just killed—a girl and her little kid.

"For God's sake, Bill—*your* girl and her little kid. *Your* daughter."

"That's right," Evans said woodenly and moved apart, suddenly, and stood with clenched hands, his back turned to them.

Jellinks seized the opportunity. "You heard what he said. Driving quite slow, he said, and him a copper. And he ought to know!"

"Perhaps it's him that's shocked and confused," said the sergeant.

"Well, *I* thought you were driving fast," said a woman, coming forward. A couple of cars had drawn up, and a small group of on-

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lookers stood wretchedly around. "He passed me ten miles back, going at the rate of knots."

"I could've slowed down later," said Jellinks, growing from wary to a little cocky.

"Yes, well . . . Just come out of the Pig and Whistle, Jellinks, had you?" said the sergeant. "At closing time."

"Yes, I had. I come out of the Pig and Whistle most nights of my life at closing time," said Jellinks. "But I wasn't drunk, I never get drunk, they'll tell you so—and you've done all your breathalysing."

"And for once it was not a stolen car?"

"I've shown you all the bumph, haven't I? It's me own car. All right, so it was stolen originally, getting away from that job on the shoe shop. But I bought it after I'd done my time. Made a pretty good mess of it, but I could patch it up myself. So I went, honest, to the owner and he was glad enough to get rid of it."

"And you had the proceeds of the till to pay for it?"

"I'd done me stint for that," said Jellinks, shrugging.

The sergeant stood, waiting. Two constables were nosing about the road—looking at the car, the tracks, making notes, taking names and addresses. He watched them but he knew his men—they were efficient and thorough; he could safely leave it all to them. And Bill Evans was under control again and had turned back to him. "We went into that, Sergeant, when Constable Jones turned up—it's Jellinks' own car. And he's right about the breathalyser too. Just under the margin."

"I know the score," said Jellinks.

"You'd have to," said the sergeant, "wouldn't you?—driving the way you do and for the reasons you do." And to Evans, "So he took the bend okay?" Passing cars had obscured the tiremarks in the road, swinging out to avoid the group gathering around the scene of the accident.

"That's right, yes." The attendants had closed the ambulance door with a slam, and more to distract him than anything else, the sergeant suggested, "Just run through it once again for me, before we get to the station. If you can manage it," he added compassionately, looking at the sick white face watching the ambulance with its pathetic burden driving away.

"That's all right, Skip. Well, like I told you, I was on my bike, just at the end of my beat. I knew I'd meet them, our Jenny and the baby, coming back from the Other Granny's. The Other Granny, that's what we call her. Lives just down the road—on her own she

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is now, since her Tom married our Jenny and moved in with me and the missis."

"Yes—so?" said the sergeant, gently interrupting; he knew all about Bill and Bill's missis and Tom and Jenny and the baby; and the Other Granny too. The officers were all local men.

"Yes, well he—the car—was coming up behind them. Came round the bend—not fast, I can't say he was going too fast. But . . ." He made a huge effort. "They saw me coming. The little one—she ran forward to meet me, ran into the road, and her mother went after her to catch her." He looked at Jellinks steadily. "I got to say it," he said.

It was beginning to get to Jellinks. He looked ill now in the evening light. But he clutched greedily at salvation. "Okay, well, you've heard him. I was going slow enough, the kid ran into the road and the girl after her—it wasn't my fault."

"And you stopped at once. You weren't driving on?"

"The—well, the jolt like, that stopped me—"

"Two jolts," said Evans with murder in his voice.

"—and anyway, there he was, biking towards me. I had to stop. Well, I mean I'd've stopped anyway, of course I would."

"Something like this happened to you once before—and you didn't."

"Nobody was hurt that time. What would I stop for?" said Jellinks.

"But this time you had to?"

"I didn't have to. I could have . . . well, there you are, you see!" he said, improvising triumphantly. "I could've driven straight on, couldn't I? Run him down on his bike and driven straight on and no one the wiser. But I didn't, did I? I had nothing to be afraid of. He says himself, I was driving quite slow, the kid run across in front of me." But the triumph died and he looked at Bill Evans uneasily. "You're not going to go back on that in court and say anything different? Don't you try anything of that, mate! I've got friends—"

The sergeant looked from the white face, set and stern, to the narrow white weasel-face, vicious in self-defense. He said slowly, "Well, that's a good thing, Jellinks—you hang on to them. I think you're going to need them from now on—need all the friends you've got."

There was a good deal of confusion in the coroner's court, opinions of the minor witnesses varying, as such opinions tend to do. The car was—was not—going fast. They had lain here—lain there—the two

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pitiful dead bodies. The child's little push-chair had been all smashed up—in the center of the road—on the grass at the verge. The mother had been wheeling the baby—had been leading her, holding her little hand. But Evans stood in the box, four-square, ashen-faced, hands horribly shaking but—positive.

"As honest a witness," said the coroner, summing it all up, "as it's been my privilege to listen to in all my experience. The constable saw the whole thing from beginning to end. He tells his story clearly, he says frankly that the driver was not to blame. Other witnesses may be confused by shock but Evans is a trained observer and trained in reporting his observations; and none of you will suppose that he could be biased in favor of the driver who had run down his daughter and her child. There can be only the one verdict—accidental death."

And outside the court he sought out P.C. Evans and with deep respect shook his hand. "You set us all an example, Evans," he said, "of absolute honesty. You've earned our admiration and our thanks."

"I have to do what's right, sir," said Evans, and, expressionless, he moved away.

And the weeks passed and the evenings drew in and dark fell early. Pitch-dark, that night weeks later when the landlord threw Jellinks out of The Pig and Whistle a good hour before closing time. Pitch-dark with only the lights of the pub shining across the blackness of the country road.

The landlord stood in the doorway. "And don't bloody come back! I'm sick of having to chuck you out, you're wrecking my custom here."

But there wasn't that much doing in a small wayside pub and Jellinks drank spirits these days and rang up quite a packet on the till before it was time to get rid of him.

"I don't want to refuse him altogether, Sam," the landlord said to one of his regulars who, with a friend, was on the way out. "He pays. But what's got into him these days, I don't know. Never used to overdo it the way he does now. Most nights he spent in here—"

"Most nights he spent in the jug," said Sam. "In and out like a yo-yo. Chuck a brick in a window, grab a handful and make a getaway—"

"Getaway seems not just the word," said the friend, laughing.

"Still, it's true. Whenever he was out—well, he was in. In the Pig, I mean. But I never saw him tight, never." The two men started

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together down the steps. "My opinion—he's scared of something."

"He's the chap that ran down some girl and a child?"

"That's right. Her father, Evans—resident copper, he is—Evans saw it happen. But he still gave evidence—villain wasn't going too fast, all the rest of it. He could easy have said he was, but he didn't. Stood up there in court—I could scarcely believe my ears—"

They could scarcely believe their ears. "*Not* going fast?"

"No, Sergeant, not fast at all."

A different officer this time, new in the division. "But he must have been, to catch the man a wallop like that!" He threw out a hand toward the dark hump in the center of the road. "He's dead."

"His own fault. We both saw it," said Sam earnestly, "me and Jim here, coming down the steps. Tight as a tick he was. I was saying so to Jim, tight as a tick."

"Reeling all over the road," said Jim. "You couldn't miss him."

"What do you mean?—you couldn't miss him."

"You couldn't help hitting him," said Jim. "That's all. What else?"

"And that's your story too, Constable Evans? He reeled out in front of your car?"

You could see the fingers tighten, the slight recoil. But Evans said evenly, "That's right. My story, like you say."

"I don't mean to offend you," said the sergeant. "I don't mean that. But . . . these two gentlemen—they're friends of yours?"

"Never set eyes on him in my life," said Jim, "whatever it is you're suggesting."

"*Not* a friend of his?"

"No, I am not. And not a liar either."

"All right, well, I'm sorry."

"He drove round the bend doing—thirty, forty—not more. The landlord had told the other chap to clear out—"

"All according to cocker, Sarge," said the landlord righteously. "I don't have to serve a customer that's drunk. And Jellinks is drunk every night, and every night I chucks him out. Right, Sam?"

"To the great relief of all," said Sam.

"So you didn't like the man?"

"Nobody liked the man," said Sam. "Not unless they was fond of snakes. But that doesn't mean I'd stand and watch him murdered in front of my eyes, and me and my mate tell lies about it. Evans was driving regular, Jellinks was staggering around, and that was the end of it."

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"And the end of Jellinks."

"That's right," said Constable Evans. "And am I sorry for it? No, I'm not."

"No," said the new sergeant thoughtfully. He suggested, but tentatively—they seemed to be a touchy lot round here—"You just happened to be driving this way?"

"Yes," said Bill tonelessly. "Up to the cemetery."

"At nine o'clock at night?"

"Night or day, it makes no odds to me. I go when I'm off duty." And now the tone of his voice did question: any objection?

"To visit your daughter's—" The sergeant broke off. "Yes, I know about that. I understand."

"Yes, well . . . That'll save me explaining then, in so many words, that I drive out to the cemetery to say my prayers by the grave of my girl, lying in her coffin there, with her baby in her arms." And he jerked the toe of his solid, black, hobnailed boot toward the figure, laid out now, by the side of the road. "Killed by—him."

"Of course. Yes, I know. I heard about it. But it was an accident. You yourself gave evidence—the car was not driven too fast, the child ran across his path—"

"That's right. Just like tonight. An accident. Car not driven too fast. But—"

"—the man reeled across your path." The sergeant thought it over. "A coincidence. Extraordinary coincidence, Constable—you'd have to agree to that?"

"Oh, I do," said Constable Evans, poker-faced.

"And yet—"

In the brightness shining across from the pub, lighting up the small group standing there facing one another, tense and still, the men were lifting the stretcher into the ambulance; the hush was absolute as the throbbing of the engine died away into the night. The sergeant could begin herding them all off down to the station now.

And yet— And *yet*—

"The accident to your daughter, Evans, and her baby—you were the only witness, isn't that so?"

"Me and that—me and the driver, yes."

"Yet you gave evidence that certainly saved him from a prison sentence. And now—"

"And now he's dead. A second accident," said Evans.

"Coincidence," said the sergeant again. He thought it all over

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quietly. Extraordinary. But coincidences did happen. And what else—? He could ferret around, he could inquire, but how much would that tell him? A man driving on a routine journey. A man reeling drunkenly across his path. Two unbiased witnesses on the spot, seeing it all happen. Collusion?—only collusion could offer any other explanation.

But these were not people to get together to hatch up a plot—to plan, to carry out a thing like this; and one of them was, in fact, a "foreigner"—anyone from across the county border was a foreigner here; he could check but he knew he would find it was true—the second witness was a stranger to them all.

Coincidence: it had to be. Fate. The Hand of God.

The sergeant, a religious man, took off his cap, standing there looking down at the pool of blood, dark on the roadway, where a man had died—run down by the man whose child the victim himself had run down a few weeks before.

"The Hand of God," he said. "Some of us might call it Fate. I call it the Hand of God."

The Other Granny—she was a fly old bird. Grannies come in different ages but this Granny had had a long family, with Bill Evans' son-in-law at the tail end of it: she was *old*. They all met at Evans' home on the day of the inquest and drank a quiet cup of tea to celebrate his exoneration from blame in the accident to Jellinks. An extraordinary coincidence, the coroner had said, echoing the sergeant's words on that earlier night; but Fate, that was all you could call it, blind Fate.

And Fate was what they were calling it at home, over their cups of tea. "Everyone knows Bill gave his evidence honest and true, when he might have said a wrong word and got that villain what he deserved. Not that you could say anything else, love. We know that. You had to say it."

"Yes, I did," said Bill.

"Well, I don't know that *I* could have done it," said young Tom. "Not stood there and let him off scot-free, when he'd surely have got a stretch for it. I got to respect you, Dad, honest." Unless, he added, with one of the few smiles he had smiled since his pretty young wife and their baby had died, his pa-in-law might have been saving it up—for this?

"Don't talk silly!" said the old lady. "How could Bill know that Jellinks would be staggering about the road that hour of night? It

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wasn't closing time, was it? And just as he happened to be driving by; all sorts of odd times he goes up to—well, we all know where he was going, poor old Bill, same as all of us goes. And that Jim What's-his-name coming out with Sam, the exact right minute to see it happen. Fate it was, the Coringer said so, and he was right. Fate. Retribution, that's the big word for it and just Fate that our Bill was the one to hand it out." And she got up and stretched her old bones and said if Bill would be a dear now and run her home—

"I'll take you, Mum, in the side-car."

"No, you won't, Tom, thanks all the same. I'll go with Bill. That side-car of yours—no, thanks! I'm a bit too fly for that."

And a bit too fly for Police Constable Evans too. Sitting beside him, nice and comfortable in the car. "Well, it's all over, Bill, my dear. And you'll feel better, now it's done."

"What's done?" said Bill, his grip tightening on the steering wheel.

"Like I said—retribution. What they're all calling Fate. And let 'em," said the old lady. "Then everyone's happy. That's best."

"Fate and retribution—aren't they the same thing?"

"No, they're not," she said. "And you know it. None better. Fate you can't control, can you? Retribution you can."

"God helps them that helps theirselves," he said.

"He wasn't going slow, was he? Police after him or not, he drove like a demon, always did. Came blinding round that bend, didn't he? And you'd have said so. But when it come out that it was his own car, not stolen, no *need* for him to be driving fast—well, then it was going to be his word against yours, and you her Dad and the baby's Grandad. With a doubt like that in their minds they'd never have dished him out a long sentence, they couldn't. And what was a few months to that one? In and out of prison like a jack-in-the-box, his home away from home. That wasn't going to be any punishment, that wasn't going to be enough. You were going to have to take it into your own hands."

They had come to her gate; it wasn't very far—Jenny had been walking it that evening, pushing her baby in the pram. "She never did run into the road, did she?—poor little love. In the push-chair, like some of them gave evidence, only they all contradicted one another. In the push-chair—why would her mum be walking her home, that time of night? He came round the corner, didn't he, driving like a maniac, as always; took the bend too sharp and just—just mowed them down."

Two tears trickled down her withered old cheeks; she made no

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attempt to wipe them away, they were welcome there. Her thin fingers, noded like bamboo, rested on Evans' heavy hand gripping tightly now on the steering wheel.

"You're safe with me, Bill. Nobody else will know. But I *saw* her go off with the baby in the push-chair, didn't I? So I realized. You're not so green as you're cabbage-looking, old Bill, are you?—and you thought quick and acted quick; and all I'm saying is, right or wrong, you're safe with me."

"I made up my mind," he said. He had switched off the engine; the car stood, an oasis of warmth and privacy, at the little gate. "All in a minute I made up my mind and I never changed it again and I haven't changed it now. I had to make him pay, and anyone who couldn't understand that—they didn't see my pretty ones die; they didn't hear them die."

"He's paid," she said. "With his life."

"And with every hour to the end of his life," said Bill. "You should have seen his face when I said that he was driving slow. What's he up to, he was thinking to himself, he knows I wasn't driving slow. And then when I said about—about the baby running to meet me, running out into the road! She was in her pram, he knew she'd been in her pram, Jenny was wheeling her in the pram, right on the verge, on the grass. So why was I saying different, why was I saving his neck? He was frightened then. But what was he to say? I'd got him trapped, hadn't I—he couldn't contradict me. Whatever way he played it, I'd got him trapped."

"That'll be why he took the drink so much?"

"That's right. I couldn't know what way it would take him, I just had to wait and hope that the chance would come. I wouldn't want to get copped for it; for myself, I didn't care—you can understand that, old lady, can't you?—but there was the missis, and your boy, too, I wouldn't want more pain for him. But Jellinks started drinking hard and I knew that was going to be a help—night after night, drinking himself silly to shut out the fear of the threat—he knew some threat was there and there was nothing he could do about it. Short of confessing to perjury, short of admitting to have killed them through reckless driving, what was he to do?"

"He might have done that in the end. Rather have gone to prison."

"Even Jellinks wouldn't like the sort of sentence that would have got him, him having perjured himself and all. And it wasn't the first accident he'd had and he hadn't stopped for the last one. But like you say, he might do it—I had to go careful. So I watched him. Night

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after night—the missis thought I was out alone somewhere, brooding. Well, so I was; but I was watching him. Out by the pub, sitting quiet in my car, watching out of the darkness, under the trees. Till I knew exactly, as time went by, how long he'd last before they chucked him out. And then one night, when things were right, I'd cop him. And so I did."

"All planned?"

"Like I said," he said. "And nothing left to chance."

"It was chance them two being there to witness it, Bill. You couldn't judge what time they'd come out."

"I didn't have to judge it," he said. "I arranged it."

"Now, come on, Bill!"

"I'm the copper round here," he said, "aren't I? I know what goes on. I know old Sam works night shifts—on duty ten o'clock. I know he calls in at The Pig on his way to work. I know what time he leaves to get to the job."

"You couldn't know he'd have a stranger with him?"

"*I* knew all right, don't you worry. I arranged it."

"All right, old clever chops," she said with mock resignation. "You arranged for old Sam to come out of the pub just at the minute that Jellinks would reel out in front of your car, bringing a stranger with him for—what do they call it?"

"Unbiased witness."

"You arranged it?"

"This is my manor," he said again. "I know what goes on. I knew that Sam's mate, Jamie, off duty for a week—"

"You arranged that too, I daresay?"

"That's right," he said, "Poor old Jamie—brought him in at last for poaching."

"Bill, you never!"

"He had it coming to him. Lucky to get away with it for so long."

"Till you needed him."

"Till I *didn't* need him on the night shift with Sam. They'd have to bring in a temporary. And like I say, I know. I knew he was being sent in from the other factory, I knew he was coming in by the eight forty, stopping outside The Pig. I knew Jim was meeting him there and having a pint with him before they went off to work. It was just a matter of waiting till the time coincided exactly, them following Jellinks out immediately. And that night it did, as I knew very soon it must. That wasn't chance, Gran, that wasn't luck. That was good judgment."

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"Yes, good judgment." But wasn't that for God, really? Was it for mere man to hand out judgment—to hold trial, to find guilty, to sentence, to execute? She said, following her own line of thought, "After all, Bill, this was not murder. He didn't intend to kill them."

"He didn't care whether he did or not," said Bill. "That was good enough for me."

"Well . . ." she said doubtfully. "But you're not God, are you, love? The Hand of God, they're calling it." She mused over it. "The Hand of God. Mind you, I'll say not another word about it, not even to you. But . . . wouldn't some people say you should have left it, Bill? Just left it to Him, put your hand into the Hand of God."

"And so I did, my old dear," he said, leaning across to unwrap the warm rug from about her ancient legs and then lead her into the cottage. "So I did. But just to make certain, I gave it a bit of a tug."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Mr. Hoch reminds us that "the Rand stories started out being about codes and ciphers," and he is always pleased when he "can return to that original concept of a secret message." We are also pleased. As for Rand, the Double-C man, he must be pleased too. When Hastings, his former superior, calls, Rand can't help wondering if he'll ever be free of his past, when he was director of Concealed Communications for British Intelligence. But thank St. Edgar, Rand does go back to work—grumbling a bit perhaps, but deep down, pleased . . .

THE SPY AND THE WALRUS CIPHER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"We have a defector," Hastings said over the telephone. "A really top-level fellow, straight from Moscow."

"Good for you!" Rand congratulated him. "I'm retired, remember?"

"And I know I promised not to bother you with our troubles, Rand, but we're in a bit of a bind. We have this fellow at the estate up in Scotland along with a crack team of debriefers, and the trouble is he won't talk."

"Won't talk? Then what did he defect for?"

"He says he'll talk to you, Rand. Nobody else."

"Who is it?"

Hastings hesitated. "Your home telephone isn't secure. I don't want to mention any names."

Rand held the receiver away from him, tempted to hang up and be done with it. Still, if the defector was asking for him—

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"All right," he decided. "I suppose I can come see him. Where do you want me?"

"I can't go up myself. We're busy with this Middle East thing. But if you'll be at Heathrow at ten in the morning I'll have someone meet you with instructions and plane tickets. We'll want you to fly up there, of course. It's too dangerous bringing him down to London."

"Very well," Rand agreed. He hung up the phone wondering if he would ever be free of his past, free of Hastings and those others who'd been part of his life when he was director of Concealed Communications for British Intelligence.

He went into the kitchen and told his wife, "Leila, I have to go away for a few days. Up to Scotland."

She didn't look up from the mixing bowl. It was her semester break from the course she taught at Reading University, and Rand knew she'd been hoping they could go off somewhere for a few days. "For Hastings?" she asked simply.

"Yes."

"It's always for Hastings, isn't it? How much of our lives does that man want?"

"They have a defector. He won't speak to anyone but me."

"It must be nice to feel so wanted."

"Leila—"

"Never mind. I'm sorry."

"I'll try to be back by Wednesday. We'll still have the weekend."

"Yes. The weekend."

Spring came late to that portion of Scotland, and though the trees were beginning to leaf out there was still a memory of winter's dampness clinging to the air. Rand had visited the estate, as it was called, only once before—when he'd been a junior cipher clerk in British Intelligence. Now, driving up to the front door with a laconic chauffeur who'd met him at Glasgow Airport, he was struck at once by the changes which had gone into modernizing the place. They might pass unnoticed to the casual observer, but to Rand's practiced eye the steel window grilles, the unobtrusive television cameras, and the electronic door locks shouted a need to keep people out—or in, as the case may be.

The present interior of the rambling country house was even more startling. An entire wing that had once housed a cozy library and study had been gutted to make room for a modern computer and communications center. Sir Roscoe Hammond, the tall white-haired

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intelligence officer who'd greeted him at the door, seemed to take particular pride in it.

"We have equipment here that's the equal of anything in Whitehall or your old department, Rand. Instant communication with any British embassy in the world, plus the latest in decoding equipment. This is my responsibility at those times when we don't have guests staying here."

"When will I meet your guests?"

"The debriefing team will be at lunch. They've delayed it especially for you." They walked past a row of electric typewriters where tailored young women worked without looking up. "What do you think of it all, eh? Changed quite a bit since your last visit, I'll wager."

"It certainly has," Rand agreed, wondering how this proper diplomat knew of his last visit. Perhaps on one of those computer reels behind their dustproof windows was stored the history of everyone who crossed these portals.

"This way, then," Hammond said. "You must be hungry."

Rand was pleased to see that the massive formal dining room, at least, had been left intact. The long table could seat a dozen with ease, but at the moment there were only six places set, clustered at one end. A striking young woman with coal-black hair turned and smiled as they entered.

"Ah, Roscoe, so you've brought our visitor! This must be the celebrated Mr. Rand."

Rand returned her smile. "You have me at a disadvantage."

Hammond took charge of the introductions. "Rand, this is Polly Carver, our language expert. As it turned out, we haven't needed her skills. The person in question speaks quite acceptable English."

She shook Rand's hand. "A pleasure to meet you."

"I hope I'm not all that celebrated," he remarked, unable to tear his gaze from her emerald-green eyes. "It can be fatal in this line of work."

"Ah, but you're retired, and retired spies are like retired chief inspectors of Scotland Yard. They settle down to write their memoirs and appear on television talk shows."

"I haven't done that yet, though I will admit to doing a bit of writing. I may even turn to fiction, if that's a way around the Official Secrets Act."

She directed him to a chair next to her own, while Hammond went in search of the others. "You seem awfully young to be retired.

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When they said the famous Rand was coming up to see our prize I anticipated a kindly gray-haired gentleman with a walking stick."

"Sorry to disappoint you," he murmured.

"It's hardly a disappointment! In fact, you're the one bright spot of an otherwise dreary week. I expect—"

She was interrupted by the return of Roscoe Hammond. He had a short stocky man in tow, whom he introduced as, "Toby Fly, our expert on covert operations."

Toby Fly walked with a peculiar rolling motion that hinted at some old leg injury that hadn't entirely healed. He was a jolly man with a little mustache and an obvious eye for the youthful Miss Carver. "Pleased to meet you, Rand. Ah, I see you've been introduced to our Polly. Hands off her, now! I saw her first."

"I'm a happily married man," Rand told him with obvious sincerity.

Fly gave him a wink, then settled down to business. "You're Hastings' man in Concealed Communications, aren't you?"

"Was. I've been retired nearly five years now."

"That long? No wonder our paths never crossed."

"You'd be wise to stay out of his path," Polly Carver warned. "He likes to pinch."

"Not men, I don't!" Toby Fly chuckled. "You're safe, Rand."

Another man entered, somewhat younger than Hammond and Fly. He wore glasses and a studious look, but his broad shoulders and wide chest hinted that a muscle man might lurk beneath the casual white sweater and slacks. "Mark Temple—Professor Mark Temple—our Russian expert."

"Hello, Rand. I believe we met once at a symposium up at Cambridge, just after you retired. Good to see you again."

Rand remembered the man then. He'd seemed brilliant but slightly pompous in spite of his youth, and Rand hadn't realized then that he was part of the intelligence community. "Yes, I remember your theories on Soviet expansion in the Middle East. You proved to be quite a prophet."

"It's my specialty," Temple replied, accepting the praise. Then he told Hammond, "We might as well start. Olimski won't be joining us for lunch."

The name stirred Rand's memory. "I thought Olimski defected years ago. He can't be your mysterious guest."

"No, no," Hammond assured him. "Olimski is the fifth member of our debriefing team. We find it wise to have a previous defector

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present to put the subject at his ease. You see, I'm permanently assigned in charge of operations here. We use the estate as a world-wide communications center and as a jumping-off place for certain covert operations. The debriefing area is in the other wing, quite separate. We don't have that many defectors these days, but it's still a good place to bring them. Gets them away from the press until we have a chance to talk."

A light lunch was served and they ate for a bit before Rand asked, "Just who is the defector?"

Hammond exchanged glances with the others. Then he replied, "Anton Lifnov."

"Our biggest prize in years," Toby Fly said. "You know him, don't you, Rand?"

"I met him once in Moscow," Rand admitted. "But it was quite casual. I can't imagine why he'd ask for me to be here." Lifnov was a middle-aged cog in the Russian intelligence machinery—a bureaucrat of no special importance who would now achieve his moment of glory as a defector to the west. Rand met the man briefly following some trouble in Moscow a few years back.

"He came here a week ago," Roscoe Hammond continued. "Flew in by way of Dublin, accompanied by one of our people who arranged the defection. Claimed he had valuable information which he would sell us in return for money and a new identity in the west."

"He came alone?"

"Yes. His wife died recently. Apparently he decided to make a new start. I went by the book and assembled a debriefing team: Temple, our Russian expert—Toby Fly, covert operations—Olimski, a previous defector—and Miss Carver, our language expert. Anton Lifnov arrived and met with us all—and would say nothing."

"Nothing?"

"He refuses to discuss his former position or anything about his life in Moscow," Polly Carver confirmed. "All he talks about is our weather."

"But he said he had information."

Mark Temple took up the conversation. "So he did. But whatever it is, he won't tell us. We tried to reason with him but he would say nothing. Finally we asked him if there was anyone at all he would speak to."

"He thought about it for a full day," Toby Fly said. "Then he came up with your name, Rand. We knew you used to be one of Hastings' people, so we phoned him."

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Rand finished the last of his lunch and sipped a cup of cool coffee. "Interesting. Well, I suppose as long as I'm here I really should see him as soon as possible."

Hammond played nervously with his napkin ring. "Before you do, I think it would be wise if you spoke with Olimski. I'd hoped he would join us, but he's been keeping pretty much to himself. Polly, could you take Mr. Rand up to Olimski's room, please?"

"Certainly." She patted her mouth with a napkin and pushed back her chair. "Let's go up now."

They left the three men still at the table and Rand followed her up the broad front staircase to the second floor. The sound of typewriters from the remodeled wing barely penetrated here, and by the time they reached the upstairs hall the thick carpeting deadened all sound. "The atmosphere around here is quite relaxed," Rand observed.

"We're all like children on holiday," she admitted. "It's such a treat after being cooped up in a London office."

Rand noticed a locked door which seemed to lead to the far wing of the house. "Is that where Lifnov is?"

"Yes. You'll see him soon. It's kept locked for his own protection. He's not a prisoner." She paused before another door and knocked.

A voice from inside responded with a single word. "Enter."

Rand knew Olimski from newspaper photographs at the time of his defection. He was a mountain of a man, with a smooth bald head and piercing dark eyes. He rose from his chair now and bowed slightly, a motion which seemed incongruous in someone so large. "Excuse me for not joining you at lunch, Polly," he said in heavily accented English. "I was doing some writing."

"This is Mr. Rand, the man Anton wished to see."

"Ah!" He didn't smile and Rand was unable to read his thoughts. "So you will succeed where all of us failed?"

"I'll talk to him," Rand said. "That's about all I can promise. What do you think the problem is?"

Olimski shrugged his massive shoulders. "When I first came here I had my doubts too. Did I do the right thing? Could I ever go back to my countrymen? One gets over them. One learns to start a new life."

"Is there anything I should know before I see him?"

"Only that you must go slowly with him. Remember, the Russian nature is a devious one at best. Do not judge him by your English standards."

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Rand thought he could understand why Olimski did not mingle with the others. "You don't much care for the British, do you?"

Another shrug. "I will not speak ill while I am a guest in your country. Certainly if your people were all as charming as Miss Carver here there would be no problem."

"Would you like to be with me when I speak to Lifnov?"

Polly Carver interrupted. "Anton especially requested that he meet with you in private, Mr. Rand."

"Very well." He held out a hand to the Russian. "Nice meeting you, Olimski. I'm sure we'll have a chance to talk after I've heard what Lifnov has to say."

At the door Polly Carver paused. "Will you be joining us for the evening meal?" she asked Olimski.

He hesitated, then said, "Yes, certainly. I will be down very soon."

She closed the door behind them and led Rand down the hall. "A difficult man. I try to make allowances, but I find him hard to work with."

"Did you know him before this week?"

"I was a member of the team that debriefed him following his defection three years ago."

"Were any of the others on the team?"

"Well, Sir Roscoe was in charge of the estate, as he is now. But the others on the team were different. I only met Toby Fly this week. Mark Temple and I have known each other for about a year."

There was something in her tone that caused him to respond, "Socially?"

"Why do you ask?"

"He's a handsome young man, and you're certainly attractive."

"Thank you, kind sir." She unlocked the door to the other wing, and it was obvious she didn't plan a direct answer to his question about Temple. He supposed it was none of his business, after all, and her silence on the matter was really answer enough.

He followed her through another door into a small well-decorated suite. The colors were cheerful and one whole wall was filled with books in English and Russian. The small man who waited there for him was such a contrast to Olimski's imposing bulk that Rand had to restrain himself from commenting on it. It was still the Anton Lifnov he remembered, but the man seemed to have shriveled since their last meeting.

"Ah, Rand!" he exclaimed. "It is so good to see you again, so good of you to come!"

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Polly glanced at the tray of food on the coffee table. "You haven't touched your lunch, Anton."

"I was not hungry. Perhaps now that Rand is here I will drink a little of the wine."

"I'll leave you two alone," she said. "Just push the buzzer when you're finished."

"You're looking good," Rand lied when they were alone.

Anton Lifnov smiled. "It was a difficult decision to come over to your side. Our meeting in Moscow was brief, but I think it was that as much as anything which finally decided me. You were not the villain I had imagined. You were only a man much like myself. I decided I could spend the rest of my life among such men."

"And you can," Rand assured him. "We're all here to help you."

The Russian paused and took a deep breath. "There is one problem. A very serious problem. That is why I told them I must see you."

"I'll help in any way I can."

"You see, I came over to your side with a certain piece of information. It was to be my passport to a happier tomorrow. The information concerned a double agent now in the employ of British Intelligence." Anton Lifnov smiled sadly and took the glass stopper from the decanter of wine on his luncheon tray. "A bit of white wine?"

"I'll pass for the moment," Rand said.

Lifnov filled his own glass and continued. "You must realize that day-to-day activities in my section were much like your own. We were a shadow of British Intelligence, trying to duplicate your thinking and your procedures. Wherever possible our equipment was the same as yours, even to the latest-model IBM typewriters like the ones downstairs."

"I'm surprised they gave you a tour."

"Briefly, on the night I arrived. No one was working there. I told Hammond the same thing. It reminded me of my office in Moscow."

"Did you speak English there?"

"As much as possible. A knowledge of the language was essential in our cryptographic section, of course."

"Of course."

"So I was familiar with western ways, and when at last we met in Moscow that brief time, I began to think the west would not be so bad. My wife had died of cancer, I was at loose ends. Ideology meant little to me. I came west, bearing the name of a double agent as my security to a new life."

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"And?"

He lifted the wine glass. "They brought me here for debriefing, and I found that one of these five people was the very person I had planned to betray."

"What?" Rand almost came out of his chair.

"You see why I could talk to none of them? I do not know their relationships. I do not know their loyalties. If I revealed the information to any one of them I could wind up dead before morning. That is why I had to have someone from outside, someone I thought I could trust. Yours was the only name I knew." He took a drink of the wine.

"If what you're telling me is true, we must—"

Rand froze, leaving the sentence unfinished, as Anton Lifnov suddenly dropped the wine glass and clawed at his throat.

"Lifnov! What is it?"

The Russian toppled out of his chair, and as Rand bent to help he caught the unmistakable odor of bitter almonds. There'd been cyanide in the wine, and Anton Lifnov had died with his secret.

The others came quickly in response to Rand's summons. Of the five, Sir Roscoe Hammond seemed the most disturbed by the body on the floor. "My God, this will ruin me. Whoever poisoned him, it was my responsibility!"

Toby Fly took a quite different approach. "You're telling me he was killed by one of us five?"

"That seems to be the case," Rand agreed. "He told me one of you is a double agent. He had no contact with anyone else in the building, did he?"

"None," Sir Roscoe confirmed. "He arrived at night. I showed him around a bit, introduced him to these four, and took him to this suite where he's remained for the past week."

"Who brought him his meals?"

"Sometimes we would all eat with him up here. Lately we've taken turns bringing him the food because he seemed to prefer eating alone."

"Who brought it to him today?"

"I did," Mark Temple answered.

Rand looked at the untouched food. "Perhaps that's why he was afraid to eat it."

"But he drank the wine," Temple pointed out. "He wasn't afraid of that."

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"Apparently he never considered poison," Rand agreed. "Even the odor of bitter almonds didn't warn him."

Olimski grunted and came forward. "You are overlooking the most obvious possibility, Mr. Rand—that my comrade became depressed after fleeing his homeland and took his own life."

"After telling me what he did? It hardly seems likely. Tell me something: who else had access to the luncheon tray, and especially to the decanter of wine?"

"I helped prepare the food," Toby admitted. "I like puttering around in the kitchen."

"And I poured the wine from a fresh bottle," Polly Carver said. "Sir Roscoe was right there too."

Hammond agreed. "Any of us but Olimski could have poisoned the decanter."

Temple cleared his throat. "I'm afraid our Russian friend isn't exempt from suspicion. I stopped by his room to see if he was joining us for lunch, and I had Lifnov's tray along. I even set it down and chatted for a few moments. I went to the window when I heard your car arriving, Rand. He could have poisoned the wine while my back was turned."

"What do you say to that?" Rand asked the Russian.

"It is not worthy of a reply."

"So all five of you had the opportunity. Now what about the means? The cyanide?"

Roscoe Hammond sighed. "More of my responsibility, I fear. I told you this estate was occasionally used to mount covert operations. Naturally we have necessary supplies on hand—weapons, short-wave radios, secret inks, and suicide capsules."

"Cyanide."

"Exactly. Any of us could have stolen one and emptied the liquid into that decanter."

"But none of us as well as you, Sir Roscoe," Olimski observed.

Rand held up his hand. "Let's calm down. We'll get nowhere accusing each other. Toby, you're in charge of covert operations. You must have known where the poison was kept here."

"No, no, my friend. It was all Sir Roscoe's responsibility at this end."

Hammond took a deep breath. "They've been here a week, Rand. Any of them could have stumbled onto the poison, or brought some along for just such an emergency. We didn't search them, after all."

"What about the dead man?" Rand asked, staring down at his

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contorted body. "Did you search him?"

"No need. He came without luggage. We even gave him fresh clothing at this end."

"And yet," Rand remembered, "he said he came *bearing* the name of the double agent. Did he mean that literally, that he carried the name on his person?"

"Only one way to find out," Toby Fly said. "Let's strip him and examine the body."

Sir Roscoe Hammond cleared his throat. "I think the young lady might be excused before we get on with this."

Polly Carver bristled. "He's a dead man, for God's sake! I have as much right to stay as any of you."

"Let's get to it," Rand said.

They found what they sought taped to the inside of his thigh with a wide plastic strip that almost exactly matched the color of his skin. Rand pulled it off with needless gentleness and held it up. "A tiny photograph," he decided. "Someone bring me a magnifying glass."

He peered at the photo print through the glass and saw three lines of typed letters, twenty letters to the line. "What do you make of it?" he asked Sir Roscoe, passing him the photograph and the glass.

"It's a cipher!"

"Seems to be," Rand agreed. The message read:

WALRUSORKWAITOFEEHMF
YEAAOTPYEDNTSYTGVERN
DRESTRELENOANLNAAWIO

"The first word seems to be *walrus*," Polly pointed out.

"Walrus?"

"Walrus," Rand confirmed. "*Walrus ork wait o fee hmf*, if you want to separate it that way."

"*Walrus or Kwait*," Toby suggested. "Short for Kuwait, on the Persian Gulf?"

Rand took back the message. It had been years since he'd tackled an enemy cipher, but he'd spent most of his life cracking them. "I'll need a blackboard," he decided, "pads, pencils, chalk. And lots of black coffee."

"You're really going to try breaking it?" Hammond asked.

"Someone has to."

Rand worked far into the evening while the others made arrange-

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ments for the disposition of the corpse. By midnight he'd tried the most likely substitutions without success. Toby Fly came up to watch him work. "Any luck, old man?"

"Not yet." Rand tapped a list of letter frequencies he'd made. "There are twenty letters of the alphabet represented. E is the most frequent, occurring eight times, as you might expect in ordinary English. A is next, showing up seven times. Then N, O, R, and T with five each."

"What does it mean?" Toby asked.

"Damned if I know."

"I think I'll go to bed."

An hour later Temple and Polly came by. "Any luck?" Polly asked.

"All of it bad."

Temple frowned at the blackboard where Rand had printed the message in large chalk letters. "Think it could be in Russian?"

"You know better than to ask that question. As a Russian expert you can see there are no characters from the Russian alphabet here."

"True enough. But they could be English equivalents."

"I doubt it. Before he died Lifnov told me they used English in the Moscow office as much as possible, trying to duplicate London conditions. From the sharpness of the letters in the photo I'd guess it was typed on a standard IBM typewriter, with an English language keyboard."

"What about the walrus at the start?" Polly asked.

"It could be a key word signaling the exact cipher being used, in which case the actual message would start with the letters following."

"Maybe it's not a cipher at all," she suggested. "Maybe it's a book code."

"What book?"

"*Through the Looking-Glass*. You remember 'The Walrus and the Carpenter,' don't you?"

Rand took a deep breath and put down his chalk. Almost in unison the three of them attacked the shelves of books at the end of the room. After a few minutes' search Temple shouted, "Here it is!"

"No good English library would be complete without Lewis Carroll," Rand agreed, flipping the pages until the familiar Tenniel illustration of the two creatures caught his eye. "Here it is."

It was a long poem, and they spent the next hour trying to make some connection between the letters on the blackboard and the words on the page.

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Finally, admitting defeat, Temple and Polly left him alone.

He turned out the lights and started toward the room Hammond had assigned him. Then, to help him sleep better, he went downstairs and asked Sir Roscoe if he might have a weapon to keep in his room. The slender white-haired man eyed him distastefully. "Do you really think that's necessary, Rand?"

"There's a killer in this house."

Hammond gave him a loaded Beretta automatic from his desk drawer.

In the morning the cryptic message was still on the blackboard. Sixty letters, arranged in three lines of twenty each. He broke them down into five-letter groups, the way coded messages were usually transmitted:

WALRU SORKW AITOF EEHMF
YEAAO TPYED NTSYT GVERN
DREST RELEN OANLN AAWIO

The second group in the middle line almost spelled *typed*, and this got him searching for possible anagrams.

"Still working at it?" Polly asked when she brought him breakfast at nine o'clock.

"I'm an early riser." He stared at the orange juice and toast, wondering what good a Beretta under his pillow was when he ate the food they brought him without question.

"Olimski says he's leaving today," she told him.

"Can't Hammond stop him?"

"He's too concerned about London. They've heard what happened and they want to send a team up here."

"They sent a team already," Rand pointed out. "That's what caused the trouble."

"Perhaps Olimski is right about the possibility of suicide. Perhaps the whole thing is a Russian plot to have us suspecting one another."

"That's a bit bizarre even for them."

"What about my book-code idea?"

"We tried that last night and got nowhere. Book codes use numbers, not letters."

"Couldn't these letters stand for their numerical place in the alphabet? WALRUS would be 23-1-12-18-21-19."

Rand tried it, returning again to the Carroll poem. "The twenty-third word in the poem is *and*, hardly a good beginning for a message. The twenty-third letter is *e*." He counted out the rest of them.

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"E-T-I-N-E-T. Nothing likely there."

"You said WALRUS could be just a preliminary word. Start the message with the next part."

"ORK gives us 15-18-11. The corresponding words in the poem are *his, to,* and *his* again. The letters are N-N-H."

"Well, it was a good idea."

"Let's go down and see Olimski," he suggested.

He locked the door of the suite behind them and followed Polly to the Russian's room. But Olimski had already departed. The closet was empty and his bag was gone. They met Toby Fly on the stairs. "If you're looking for that crazy Russian he's in with Hammond, typing a letter to the Prime Minister!"

"What?"

"Says this whole matter was handled all wrong, that Lifnov was driven into a state of depression and killed himself."

Toby was right. They found Olimski seated behind the big electric typewriter in Hammond's office, carefully pecking out a message while Sir Roscoe stood by helplessly. "I am sorry," Olimski told Rand and Polly, "but the truth must be told."

Rand walked behind him and watched the words he was typing. "It wasn't suicide, Olimski. It was murder. One of you is a double agent."

Mark Temple appeared in the doorway, apparently summoned by Toby who brought up the rear. "What is this, Olimski? We've got enough trouble here without your going off and writing crazy letters!"

They were all talking at once then, but Rand wasn't listening. He was staring down at the typewriter, watching the Russian's fingers and the words as they appeared on the paper. Was it possible—?

"Rand, where are you going?" Hammond called after him, but he was already out of the office and vaulting up the stairs.

He unlocked the door and hurried over to the blackboard where the message was printed.

And then he knew.

"I should have poisoned you too," a voice said from the doorway. "But a gun will be just as quick."

Rand turned to face Toby Fly.

"Can we take that as a confession, Toby?"

The gun in Toby's hand steadied and aimed, and Rand waited no longer. He fired the Beretta through the pocket of his jacket, hoping his unaimed shot would find its mark.

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Toby's weapon went off almost simultaneously, but his bullet went far to the right. His leg went out from under him and he fell to the floor, bleeding from the thigh. Rand hurried over and kicked the gun out of his reach.

Then the others were in the room, and everyone was talking. "You shot him in the leg?" Temple complained. "Why didn't you finish the swine off?"

"I wasn't really aiming," Rand admitted quietly. He handed the weapon back to Sir Roscoe.

"The cipher identified Fly?" Olimski asked.

"Oh, yes, except that it wasn't a cipher."

Polly Carver frowned. "If it wasn't a cipher, what was it?"

"A typewriter ribbon."

While they summoned an ambulance and special guards for Toby Fly, Rand explained. "Lifnov made a point of telling me their Moscow office used the latest IBM typewriters, the same as we have here. Watching Olimski type that letter just now I realized that these machines used a high-yield film ribbon. It runs through the machine only once, but at each width of the ribbon it types three characters, in this order." He jotted some numbers on the blackboard to illustrate:

963
852
741

"The letters strike the film ribbon from bottom to top, and from right to left. The ribbon doesn't advance when you strike the space bar, so the words run in together. What Lifnov did was to take a small piece of this used ribbon and make a reduced photographic print from it. The black film ribbon, with its clear spaces where the letters had struck, made a perfect film negative."

"But if it was from a typewritten message, why were there no periods or small letters? It was all capitals."

"There were no periods because we have only a portion of the complete sentence. And I imagine it was typed in all caps because it was meant to be enciphered and sent as a cable or teletype message. Capital letters are common enough in such circumstances." He pointed to the blackboard. "Reading bottom to top, right to left, as the message was typed—and putting in the likely word breaks—we read: ONFIRM WE HAVE AGENT FLY ON STATION AND WEEKLY REPORTS TO US ARE ALREADY W. The first word is

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obviously *confirm*, with the *c* missing. The last word, beginning with a *w*, could be *working* or some such word. Of course this bit of used typewriter ribbon from Moscow was no sort of proof against Fly, but in the world of double agents even the accusation would have ruined his usefulness. When Lifnov met him and then refused to talk, Toby had to kill him. Obviously he hoped Lifnov would drink the wine before he saw me, but as luck would have it he lived long enough to tell me about the double agent."

"You did fine work, Rand, forcing Fly into the open like that." Sir Roscoe shook his hand. "When Hastings hears about this he'll want you back in the department."

"There's no chance of that," Rand assured him. "I'm going back to my retirement."

Polly Carver walked downstairs with him. "Then the letters forming *walrus* at the top of the message were only a coincidence."

"That's all. They could just as easily have spelled out *cat* or *dog* or nothing at all. Unfortunately they caused me to read the message in horizontal lines, rather than consider the possibility of vertical rows. I should have suspected a transposition of some sort rather than a true cipher when I realized that *e* was the most frequent letter in the message just as it is in clear English."

Polly glanced at the clock in the downstairs hall. "You've only been here twenty-four hours. Do you always work this fast?"

He remembered Leila waiting at home. "I had an extra incentive this time," he said.

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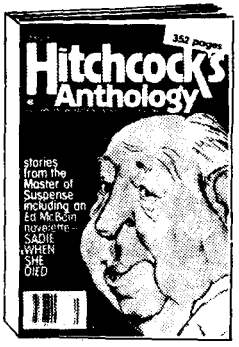
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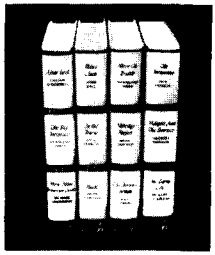

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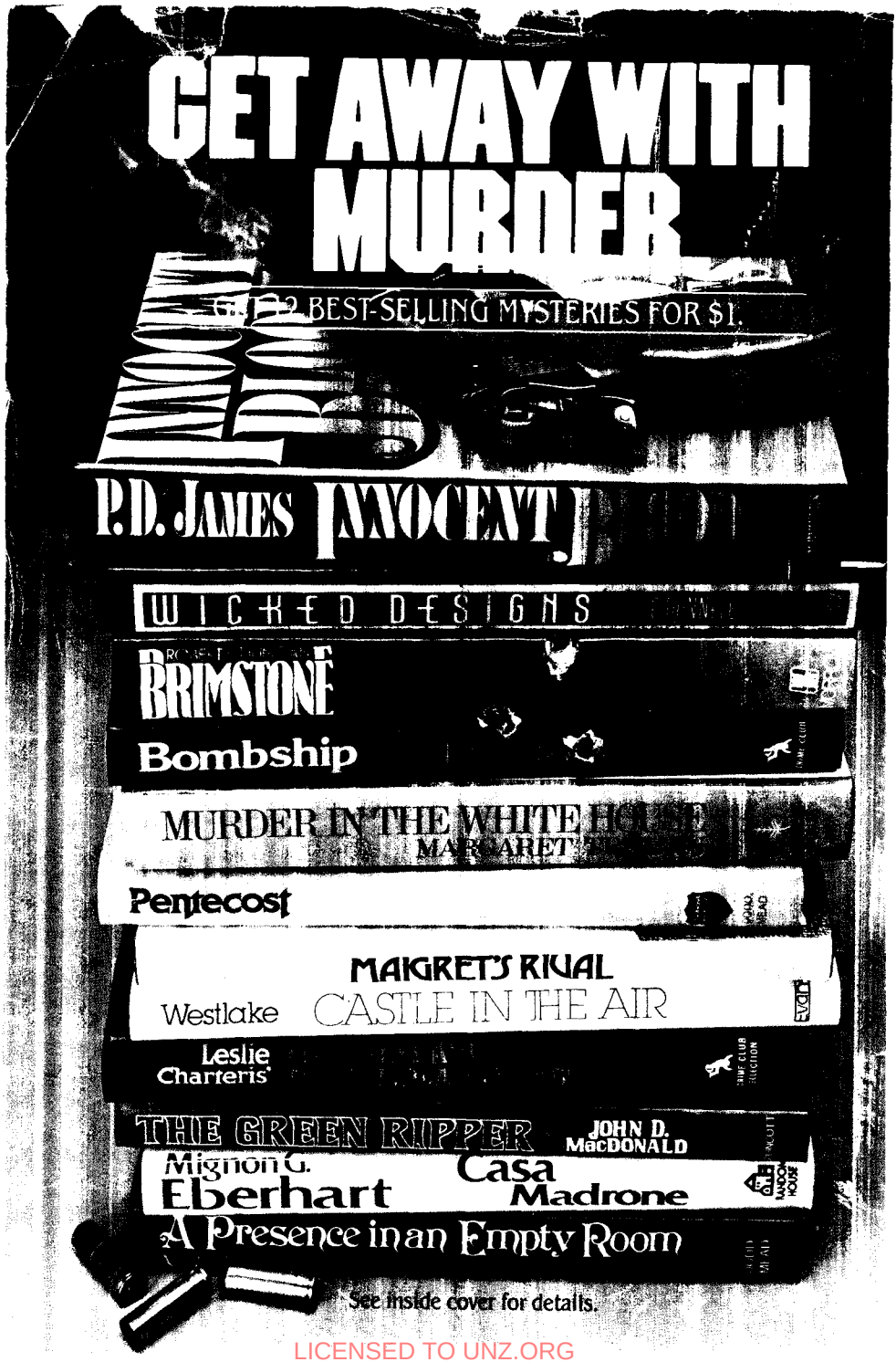

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